EXTENDING THE CREDENTIAL

Extending the Credential

Today's postsecondary students are learning in more ways than ever before, challenging college and university administrators to communicate a more complete educative experience. To meet this need, forward-thinking schools are beginning to document leadership experiences and competency achievements along with academic accomplishments. The official transcript is evolving in both form and substance. From paper sent through the mail to electronic images or standardized data exchanged online and extended to include:

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1 in 4 adult Americans have a certificate or license

Our members are extending digital credentials and storing them in one place—online—where they can be easily displayed. Allowing learners to quickly show what they know.

As we move forward, we hope these essays will help further illustrate the new generation of credentialing and that we can work together to extend the transcript, helping more learners turn more credentials into even more opportunities.

MATTHEW PITTINSKY
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INTRODUCTION

College degrees have, for years, been defined by credits earned in courses – with certain combinations of credits necessary (in the major, general education and so forth) to earn a degree.

Increasingly though, credentials are being viewed in new and different ways. Some experts say that existing models don't say enough about the capabilities graduates possess. Some favor enhancing the credential and others would like to eliminate it. Competency-based education is central to this debate, but so are such topics as badging, internships, experiential education, testing and more.

The articles in this booklet examine some of these trends, with opinion pieces providing additional perspective.

Inside Higher Ed will continue to cover these important topics, and welcomes your reactions to these pieces, and your ideas for future coverage.

--The Editors

editor@insidehighered.com

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NEWS

A selection of articles from *Inside Higher Ed*

MOVING AHEAD WITH COMPETENCY

BY PAUL FAIN

Eight Washington State community colleges will offer an online, competency-based business degree, as emerging form of higher education wins fans -- and some critics -- in the state.

*T*he online, competency-based certificate Bellevue College offered in 2014 was a hit with students. In fact, the certificate in business software was so popular that the two-year college in Washington State decided to drop its conventional online version.

"The train has left the station at Bellevue," said Suzanne Marks, a faculty member who teaches business technology systems and is the program's chair. "We went from pilot to permanent, immediately."

The certificate was part of phase one of an experiment by a handful of Washington's 34 community and technical colleges. The next phase, which began in January 2015, is the creation of a fully online, competency-based associate degree in business.

The degree will be a transfer credential, meaning students should be able to move easily to four-year institutions. The courses will feature only free and open content. And Lumen Learning, an Oregon-based company, is designing the material to be adaptive, meaning it will respond to each student's prior knowledge.

Competency will replace grades in the degree track, with the equivalent of a B being the minimum mark students must meet.

"They keep trying until they're done," said Connie Broughton, who works at the Washington State Board for Technical and Community Colleges and directs the project.

Columbia Basin College, which is the system's lead institution for the business degree, received approval from its regional

accreditor for the program. It has begun marketing the degree, which, although linked to the credit-hour standard, includes elements of self-pacing. The program will also feature assessments that students can take and pass without completing course material.

Seven other two-year colleges in Washington, including Bellevue, plan to sign on and begin offering the competency-based associate degree, according to Broughton.

A key reason for the degree's creation was research showing that there are 1 million people in the state with some college credits and no degree. Broughton said many of those people need a flexible form of higher education to go back and earn their degree.

"We saw that we need to serve learners who are not with us now," she said. "The goal is, eventually, every college can do this."

Washington's two-year colleges have joined more than 200 other institutions around the country that are giving competency-based education a whirl. However, some faculty groups at the Washington colleges have criticized the move. They said the competency-based credentials were created without adequate faculty input, and that the programs will create more work for faculty members.

Karen Strickland, president of the American Federation of Teachers of Washington, a faculty union, said administrators have

Bellevue College

not always acknowledged the new responsibilities competency-based credentials create for instructors. She also said faculty members were concerned about how the programs "disaggregate" the faculty role. They break apart the degree track with a canned curriculum and modularized course content, she said, which can be offered by a different college than the one where instructors work.

"It's a generic degree from another college," said Strickland. "What we oppose is corporatization of the learning process."

Tapping Expertise

The project in Washington began with a hand from Western Governors University, a pioneer in competency-based learning.

The nonprofit university in 2013 began working with 11 community colleges in 5 states -- including the 4 in Washington -- to help those institutions design their own competency-based credentials in information technology. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the U.S. Department of Labor chipped in funding for the project.

WGU ran workshops in those five states to expose faculty and administrators to the emerging form of higher education. Attendees in Washington ranged from vice presidents to online instructors and registrars.

The sessions "started to get the idea of competency-based education into the cultural soup," said Rich Cummins, president of Columbia Basin College.

Soon four colleges in the state began offering short-term, competency-based certificates in business and I.T.

As part of those programs, students take a pretest at the beginning of each course to identify their strengths and weaknesses. They can use those results to move faster through material they understand, earning credits when instructors deem the students competent.

The competency-based courses feature both course instructors and a navigator for students, who serves as a sort of adviser, providing support and helping them to select course sequences.

Three days into offering the certificate, Bellevue had enrolled 104 students in the program, said Marks. Another 107 or so enrolled during the second quarter.

"Students voted with their feet," she said. In particular, Marks said students like the self-pacing, the flexible due dates for work and the program's "high-tech, high-touch" approach.

Faculty members had to do a lot of work up front to create the programs. Mapping course competencies in particular is laborious, said Marks. But there was a payoff for instructors as well as students, she said. "It makes you pay more attention to instructional design, your outcomes and your assessments."

Other faculty members at Bellevue were less enthusiastic. And some have expressed concern about the college's attempt to join the Columbia Basin pilot group. Several signed a letter expressing concern about who is overseeing quality control for the degree.

"It will be taught by non-Bellevue College faculty, developed by non-Bellevue College faculty and with assessments formulated by a third party, Lumen Learning," the faculty members wrote. "Should Bellevue College lend its name to this degree?"

Self-Paced Model

The eight participating colleges in the consortium contributed a total of $1.4 million for the creation of the online transfer degree. The costs went toward the hiring of four full-time faculty members, who will oversee the business core of the program.

Columbia Basin also hired six part-time faculty members to run the general education side of the degree track.

Cummins said the program will need about 400 students to break even. Other colleges can then join by creating their own online portals for the degree track, which should be fairly simple.

"We don't believe it's going to fail," he said.

A key innovation of the program, said Cummins and others, is that students will be able to begin when they like during the first three months of each term. They must enroll full-time for the second chunk of three months.

Tuition is a $2,667 flat fee per six-month term. There is a $40 assessment fee. The program includes 18 courses, all competency based and online. Students must earn at least 20 credits per term, but can earn more at no cost. Cummins called this an "all you can eat" model.

Columbia Basin's role is about social mobility, he said. And the competency-based degree will allow "distant students to move at their own speed as well as their own time and place while ensuring a greater level of rigor across distance learning offerings." •

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

MOBILE BACHELOR'S DEGREES

BY PAUL FAIN

Brandman University goes all-in with a competency-based bachelor's degree that is online, available on a tablet, and not based on the credit hour. Its projected price tag? $10,000.

Brandman University's new competency-based bachelor's degree gives a glimpse of where the increasingly popular form of higher education might be headed.

The new bachelor of business administration is fully online. There are no textbooks. Students can access 30,000 pages of course material for the degree (not all of it required) on their tablets or smartphones.

Content is personalized, and responds to the 44 currently enrolled students based on their progress. About 60 percent of the required 80-plus "competencies" are linked to performance-based assessments, like writing a paper, working on a group project or creating a portfolio. The rest of the work is objective-based, such as test-taking.

The degree is also completely severed from the credit-hour standard. Brandman is one of four institutions to get both the U.S. Department of Education and its regional accreditor to sign off on this type of program, which is called "direct assessment." That approach means students can work at their own pace while also receiving federal financial aid.

Brandman estimates the typical student will be able to complete the degree in 30 months. At $5,400 in tuition and fees per year, that means some students should be able to earn the bachelor's degree for $10,000. That amount has become a trendy target price for a four-year degree, particularly among conservative governors. Students who take longer to complete than the expected 30 months will pay more than $13,500, however.

One reason students should be able to finish quicker than in a traditional program is that they can work toward the degree during 48 weeks of a year, rather than on a semester schedule. They will have an academic coach and access to tutoring faculty throughout.

"You can do it in bits and pieces," said Laurie Dodge, Brandman's vice chancellor of institutional assessment and planning and vice provost, adding that students can "be working on more than one competency at a time."

That's important for the nonprofit Brandman, whose students tend to be adults with jobs.

The university is a subsidiary of Chapman University, which is a private, residential institution based in Orange County, Calif. Brandman, however, offers blended and online degrees out of its almost 30 campus locations in California and Washington State. About 88 percent of the university's 12,000 students are at least 25 years old. Roughly half (46 percent) are eligible to receive Pell Grants, and 43 percent are members of minority groups.

Nontraditional students -- meaning ones who aren't 18-24 and interested in attending a residential campus -- appear to be a natural fit for the flexibility of competency-based learning, which allows them to move more quickly through material they already know or to spend more time on concepts when needed.

Many of the more than 200 institutions that are currently adding competency-based degrees are focused on working adults. Yet experts said Brandman has gone further than most.

In addition to its successful pursuit of direct assessment, the university is "possibly unique" in having taken an existing undergraduate major and rebuilt it as a competency-based program, said Mike Offerman, a consultant and president emeritus of Capella University.

As a result, Brandman's foray is "more institutional and systemic" than those of most other institutions, many of which have created new competency-based programs outside of their core bachelor's degree programs.

Business-Friendly

Several outside vendors want to help colleges give competency-based education a whirl.

College for America, a subsidiary of Southern New Hampshire University, recently spun off its competency-based learning platform. The nonprofit institution's new offering, Motivis, is now a for-profit company that offers its services to other colleges.

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learning relationship management system (LRM) can work for institutions with competency-based degrees. Gunnar Counselman, the company's founder and CEO, said one institution is using the system this way, and another 20 plan to create competency-based badges to supplement their core curriculums. Educate Online is another player in this new field.

For its experimental degree, Brandman partnered with Flat World Knowledge, a company based in Washington, D.C., which got its start as a digital textbook publisher. Flat World now offers a competency-based learning platform.

Christopher Etesse, the company's chief executive officer, said demand for competency-based education is "hotter and moving faster than the LMS market was in 1997."

Brandman's faculty members began designing its bachelor's degree in 2012, bringing Flat World in last April. One of the university's first steps was to poll 1,000 students to gauge interest in a competency-based program.

They got a positive response, and moved on to asking employers for guidance. The goal, Brandman officials said, was to ensure that the program would teach skills that applied to the workplace. To help make that happen, the initial group of students all came from one of the university's 27 employers it had sought out as partners for the degree program. College for America also draws its students from employers.

"The real entry point for competency-based education is businesses," said Gary Brahm, Brandman's chancellor and chief executive officer.

The university relied on industry standards to get the knowledge, skills and abilities students need to enter business jobs. It also drew from federal jobs databases to learn more about specific occupations.

On the academic side, Brandman leaned heavily on two frameworks for the new degree -- the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile and the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) from the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Both projects seek to better-define what students should know and be able to do. They also stress the importance of academically sound general-education requirements.

Flat World helped customize a platform for the university that included simulations, game-like elements and social-learning elements. The system collects data on student performance and engagement that can help faculty members and student advisers, said Etesse.

"We built that tracking factor into the software," he said.

The university's accreditor, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), in 2013 granted its approval to the direct-assessment program. The Education Department followed.

Alison Kadlec is a senior vice president for Public Agenda, a New York City-based nonprofit. She is helping lead a Lumina-funded group of 18 institutions and two public systems that are experimenting with competency-based education. The group, which is dubbed the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN), announced in November 2014 that it is seeking new members.

Brandman is a leader in competency-based education, Kadlec said, in part because its first focus was academic rigor.

"Institutions that are tempted to look for easy answers in the form of shiny tech solutions should take a page out of Brandman's book," she said via email, "and focus first on quality program design and let the technology solutions emerge from that solid grounding." •

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE   https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/11/26/competency-based-bachelors-brandman-could-be-glimpse-future

BIG TEN AND THE NEXT BIG THING

BY PAUL FAIN

Michigan, Purdue and the Wisconsin System give competency-based education a try, but carefully and with targeted new programs.

Competency-based education is going upmarket. Three brand-name, Big Ten-affiliated institutions are now offering degrees in this emerging form of higher education.

Yet the new programs at the University of Michigan, Purdue University and the University of Wisconsin System are not aimed at the vast numbers of undergraduates who come to those campuses for the traditional college experience. They are narrow in scope, experimental and not all that sexy.

The Wisconsin System's "Flexible Option" is the most extensive and established of the programs. Its five competency-based, online credentials, which range from a certificate to bachelor's degrees, are designed mostly for adult students with some college credits but no degree. And they are offered by the system's two-year institutions, its extension program, and the Milwaukee campus -- not the Madison campus with the lake and the 80,000-seat Camp Randall Stadium.

Even so, several observers said the measured arrivals of Michigan, Purdue and the Wisconsin System will give a boost to competency-based education. They are big-name institutions that are trying a different form of instruction, which remains both promising and controversial.

"It affirms this new emphasis on student learning outcomes," said Michelle R. Weise, a senior research fellow with the Clayton Christensen Institute, who recently published a book with Christensen on the potential for online, competency-based education in workforce development.

Weise said other colleges probably are paying attention to Wisconsin and co., in ways that they might not to lower-profile pioneers in competency-based education, such as Southern New Hampshire and Capella Universities. "The network effect is always there in higher education."

A common thread with the three institutions' experiments, university officials said, is that they seek to focus more on what students know and can do rather than how much time they spend in class.

"They will emerge with proven competencies," Mitch Daniels, Purdue's president, said in a written statement announcing the university's transdisciplinary, competency-based bachelor's

degree. "Businesses will not have to guess whether these students really are ready for the market, ready for their business, ready for the world."

Michigan joined the party with an announcement that its regional accreditor had approved a new master's of health professions education. The competency-based degree, which the medical school offers, is not based on the credit-hour standard. It is also a distance-education degree track and lacks campus-based instruction.

The university began offering the degree in 2013. It is designed for practicing physicians, nurses, dentists and others professions in health fields who have some teaching responsibilities and want to climb the career ladder. Most students will have terminal degrees and a decade or more of professional experience.

In a Web video about the program, Larry Gruppen, Michigan's chair of medical education, said the program combines practical skills and scholarship.

'Professional Activities'

"You will learn through doing relevant, education-related activities," he said, "not by sitting through a series of lectures."

Michigan's medical school submitted an application for the degree program to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), said John A. Vasquez, a program manager for the degree. The commission issued a green light. Michigan officials now will seek federal-aid eligibility from the U.S. Department of Education.

A competency-based education program wasn't such a big stretch, said Vasquez.

That's because medical professions have long used competencies and focused on task-based learning. Medical residents, for example, spend years working to hone their skills in well-defined areas.

Professors and administrators at the medical school worked for about three years designing the

master's degree. Vasquez said the central challenge was to gear the program to seasoned medical professionals.

"How are we going to get these people to come back to school?" was one key question, he said.

So Michigan brought the master's degree to students, with distance learning that relies on interaction with mentors via phone, email, Skype or in-person for students who are nearby.

The program "does not have classes or courses in the traditional sense," Michigan said in its application to the HLC. "Rather, the key unit of learning is the professional activity, which in many ways resembles a credit of independent study."

After enrolling, each student's experience and learning is reviewed by a "competency assessment panel," which assigns credit for existing competencies. Students are then assigned a mentor who is their main faculty contact. But students also interact with faculty assessors and subject-matter experts.

"The main role of the mentor is to promote learning through professional activities, facilitate learner connections with subject matter experts and learning resources," according to the university's application, as well as to "guide the learner in the process

of professional and educational planning, and advise the learner on any issues related to the program."

To demonstrate competency, students choose from 21 activities that are tied to the various health professions (see chart), depending on which ones are part of their job. These include tasks (see chart) like designing and beginning a research study, creating a teaching portfolio and critiquing a curricular change.

Activities "map" to the program's required competencies. More demanding ones might be linked to five competencies, the

university said, with one or two on the low end. These competencies in turn match up with credit equivalencies.

Students must provide documentation and evidence of competency, which could be a paper, video presentation, PowerPoint, grant application, portfolio or some combination of multiple pieces of evidence.

To successfully earn the degree, students must earn between 32 and 39 credit equivalencies. However, the program is a "direct assessment" degree, which means that competencies rather than credits are its currency. Another graduation requirement is that students pass a final "summative assessment," which is based on their learning portfolio.

The pace throughout is flexible, and students could finish more quickly than the typical program length of three years.

Vasquez said the university created the degree because of a national shortage of medical school faculty who can teach in a comprehensive way. Many clinicians, he said, have begun master's or doctoral programs but

never finished them.

Competency-based learning "makes sense for the health professions," said Vasquez. "We can say you're competent because you know what you're doing and why."

That approach, however, might be trickier for undergraduate or other programs at Michigan, he acknowledged. Campus-wide faculty groups, for example, might balk at the wide adoption of competency-based curriculums.

New Model

The Wisconsin System is one of four institutions to receive approval from the Education Department and a regional accreditor for a direct assessment program. That degree is the Flexible Option's associate in arts and science, which is self-paced.

The system is seeking department approval to offer financial aid for other online credentials that are free from the credit-hour standard, said David Schejbal, dean of continuing education, outreach and e-learning at Wisconsin's Extension program.

Schejbal said faculty members are also working on two new competency-based degrees -- a bachelor's degree in professional studies and a master's in geographic information systems. The professional studies degree will be aimed at adult degree completers, he said, and will be

"

BUSINESSES WILL NOT HAVE TO GUESS WHETHER THESE STUDENTS REALLY ARE READY FOR THE MARKET, READY FOR THEIR BUSINESS, READY FOR THE WORLD.

"

built by combining several new stackable certificates.

The system is being intentional in how it creates the new curriculums, said Schejbal. That means starting with top-level competencies and then working backward to get more granular.

He said faculty members are using the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile and the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) project from the Association of American Colleges and Universities as guides as they design the programs.

Purdue's competency-based degree is housed at the Purdue Polytechnic Institute, which serves as a "transformational engine" in the university's College of Technology. Daniels gave a $500,000 prize to the Institute for its proposal to create a competency-based degree.

Faculty spent a year prior to that announcement designing the transdisciplinary bachelor's degree program, which accepted an initial cohort of 36 university students this fall. The students came from the traditional university. The university plans to begin admitting students directly to the program through the Institute. It will be open to students in any discipline.

Students in the program will graduate with the same degree, the university said, but with one or more concentrations that reflect their interests. Some of the concentrations will link up with existing Purdue majors, while others will emerge from the new program.

Purdue's program features concurrent, group-based learning sessions, which will touch on multiple subjects, the university said. And a faculty mentor will be assigned to each student.

One reason the new programs from Purdue, Michigan and the Wisconsin System have drawn notice is that public universities face extra layers of bureaucracy when creating degree programs that look different. As a result, private institutions like Western Governors University and Southern New Hampshire have dominated the field.

Schejbal said the regulatory process has been slow for Wisconsin's competency-based degrees. And adjusting administrative procedures at the system has also been a challenge, particularly those around financial aid and student registration.

"It's really rebuilding all of the back-end processes from scratch," he said, because the new degrees "don't fit the model."   •

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE   https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/10/28/competency-based-education-arrives-three-major-public-institutions

BADGING FROM WITHIN

BY PAUL FAIN

A digital badging project at UC Davis is drawing notice, but the innovation looks more like competency-based education than a form of alternative credentials.

*T*he University of California at Davis is creating what may be higher education's most promising digital badge system. But the badges are no threat to the university's degrees. They're add-ons – perhaps valuable ones for students.

"Badges can tell a different story," says Joanna Normoyle, the experiential and digital media learning coordinator at the university's Agricultural Sustainability Institute. She says they allow students to "differentiate themselves and tell a narrative."

Normoyle has helped lead the effort by faculty and staff members at UC-Davis to create a badging system for a new undergraduate major in sustainable agriculture and food systems. The final product, which went live with a small pilot group in 2014, is more about competency-based education than alternative credentials.

The idea was hatched as the university worked toward the 2011 launch of the sustainable ag major. It's an ambitious interdisciplinary program, featuring collaboration among eight departments in the university's College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences as well as the Agricultural Sustainability Institute.

The new curriculum is particularly hands-on, with lots of experiential learning that occurs outside the classroom, such as through internships and fieldwork. Much of that learning isn't captured by conventional grading.

The university wanted to help students find ways to describe their experiences, in ways that make sense to faculty, students, employers and themselves. It was a vexing challenge, because any solution had to stretch across the entire curriculum – not just individual classes.

Normoyle and her colleagues settled on badges, with an undergirding of competencies that describe the learning outcomes and skills students need to successfully complete the major.

There are seven core competencies in the program. Employers contributed to the identification of those competencies, which include

systems thinking, experimentation and inquiry, understanding values, interpersonal communications, strategic management, civic engagement and personal development.

For example, competency in systems thinking requires students to integrate societal, environmental and economic perspectives into their analysis of complex systems.

Each competency connects to digital badges students can earn for experiences, skills and knowledge. The badges themselves are graphical representations of an accomplishment – basically the digital version of a felt patch a Boy or Girl Scout might earn.

In the fall of 2013, students experimented with the badging system as part of a senior "capstone" course. Badges are not formally awarded at this point, as the system is still in its testing phase. But Normoyle says the sustainable agriculture programs plans to expand their use next semester. At some point assessments from faculty members and peers, as well as self-assessments, will be part of a final review process for the awarding of badges.

Students create an online profile where they can display the badges. Each one might be accompanied by detailed information, including a description of the student's experience, what they learned, photos, diagrams or even assessment scores.

Normoyle describes the profiles as learner dashboards or "media-rich, tiled portfolios."

For example, students might earn a badge for collecting soil samples from the student farm to test effects of different mulch treatments. They would write up that learning experience to be eligible for the badge. And the students get to decide which knowledge demonstrates their competency.

Faculty members and other students will be able to see the badges. They can also comment on them. But the students will be in charge of how they display their portfolio of badges.

"This is all about a self-reporting system," Normoyle says. "What do I think about what I know?"

The goal is for students to communicate their skills to others, and to learn about what they know in the process.

"Tools like this can complement what happens in in-person learning," she says.

Model Could Spread

Digital badges are a trendy idea. Many predict the nascent form of credentialing could pose a challenge to higher education. Ideally, badges could give people new ways beyond college credentials to prove what they know and can do.

The Mozilla Foundation, an open-source technology pioneer, has helped lead the way with its open badges project. The foundation created a "backpack" that earners can use to display badges on a résumé or social networks.

Along the way, badging has earned plenty of powerful supporters, including Bill Clinton and Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

"Badges can help engage students in learning, and broaden the avenues for learners of all ages to acquire and demonstrate – as well as document and display – their skills," Duncan said in 2011.

Duncan also linked badging to competency-based education, saying it "can help speed the shift from credentials that simply measure seat time, to ones that more accurately measure competency."

Not everybody is sold on badges, however. One reason is that anyone can award one, raising questions about quality control.

Peter Stokes is executive director of postsecondary innovation in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University. He's supportive of the concept behind badges, and thinks there are no real technical obstacles to making them work. But Stokes remains skeptical of badges having a major impact on higher education, at least for now.

"The big challenge with the badge is to create currency in the market," Stokes says.

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UC Davis is one of the first traditional institutions to give badging a whirl. Purdue University has also been a pioneer.

Sheryl Grant, an expert on badges who is director of social networking for the Humanities, Arts, Science and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC), said the badging work done by Normoyle and others at UC-Davis is the most interesting she's seen in higher education.

Grant has helped administer 30 badging projects that won a contest and received support from the Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

"They really are solving for something that the current credential system is not doing," says Grant, adding that Normoyle and company are doing so without "upsetting the apple cart" by tossing out the degree.

Grant predicts that UC-Davis's approach is one other colleges will copy. That's because, she says, they used a rigorous process to create a badging system grounded in the values of the institution, faculty, students and employers.

The end result, Grant says, is a "data visualization and recommendation system" that is "going to scale really well."

The university is drawing plenty of attention for the new badges.

Normoyle is fielding invitations to speak around the country. Interest is also high on campus and among employers.

Several experts on experiential learning said they are taking badges seriously. So is Michael V. Reilly, executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

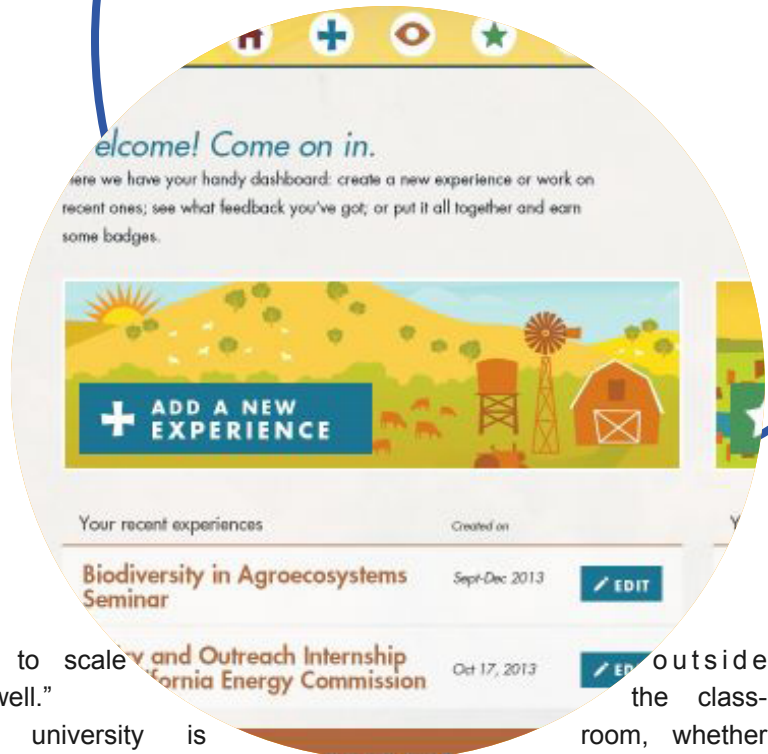Reilly said he is in favor of efforts to capture students' experiences outside the class-room, whether through e-portfolios, badging or other ideas.

"The transcript is pretty limited in what it does," he says.

"Students want a broader representation of their experiences."

Reilly likes what he has heard about the badging system at UC-Davis, particularly because Normoyle isn't talking about replacing college credentials.

"It's very much the right way to go," he says, "and much less confrontational." •

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https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/03/uc-daviss-groundbreaking-digital-badge-system-new-sustainable-agriculture-program

STANDARDIZED TESTS FOR THE JOB MARKET

BY PAUL FAIN

Interest in workplace-readiness tests grows, and some big U.S.-based companies make all applicants in India take an assessment from Aspiring Minds, an Indian firm.

Angst over the perceived "skills gap" and a dearth of trained workers is growing. Meanwhile, many complain that typical college transcripts say little about what someone knows and can do in the workplace.

One way for employers to find better job applicants might be to require all potential hires to take a test. This "GRE-for-job" assessment could measure both soft and hard skills. Employers might even require all job-seekers to get a minimum cutoff score.

There is a growing market for such workplace readiness tests in the U.S. One of the most established is ACT's WorkKeys. The suite of 11 assessments helps employers select, hire, train and retain a "high-performance workforce," according to the nonprofit testing firm.

Yet few if any major companies in this country require college graduates to earn a minimum score on a standardized skills assessment to get hired. This is happening in India, however, and U.S.-based companies are on board.

More than 1.5 million people in India have taken a test called the AMCAT (Aspiring Minds' Computer Adaptive Test). The assessment measures aptitude in English, quantitative ability and logic. It also includes a variety of situational and judgment tests, which scrutinize personality types and soft skills to see how they might apply in specific fields.

The test is proctored and takes two hours to complete. It costs 750 rupees or roughly $12 to take.

Multinational conglomerates are among the 600-plus companies that use the test from Aspiring Minds, a firm based in Gurgaon, a city located near New Delhi. Some require all applicants and all employees to take the AMCAT, said Varun Aggarwal, Aspiring Minds' chief technology officer and chief operating officer.

Accenture and Deloitte, two massive, U.S.-based consulting firms, go a step farther by setting "standardized cutoff" scores on the test for job seekers in India, Aggarwal said. So do other companies.

One is Sapient Global Markets, a business and technology consulting company. Sapient uses the assessment this way for all of its technology-related jobs in India. Prashant Bhatnagar, an India-based director for the company, said Sapient requires college-graduate applicants for tech jobs to hit a minimum score on the AMCAT to qualify for an interview.

Bhatnagar said via email that this is just the first part of a multistep hiring process, which he compares to the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT).

The test is a "great leveler," he said. It allows the company to be more fair in considering applicants who have graduated from different colleges, by relying on something other than an institution's prestige, Bhatnagar said. Sapient also uses applicants' scores on the assessment as "our own yardstick, year over year."

Coming to America?

Aspiring Minds would like to break into the U.S. market. Aggarwal said the company has had conversations with American colleges and companies.

The testing firm has partnered with edX, the massive online course provider run by MIT and Harvard University. Indian students who complete edX courses can register for free on Aspiring Minds' platform to take the assessment and seek jobs.

Aggarwal is a product of both the American and Indian higher education systems. He earned a master's in electrical engineering and computer science from MIT. Aspiring Minds' CEO, Himanshu Aggarwal, graduated from the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology, as did many of the company's 260 or so employees.

It won't be easy to build a critical mass of users in the U.S., said Aggarwal. The company has been operating in India for eight years, and only recently saw its test-taking numbers really begin to snowball. Aspiring Minds also operates in the Philippines, Ghana and the Middle East, among other places.

"It's a market-making business and people don't like tests," he said.

Even so, Aggarwal argues that the AMCAT helps make the hiring process more meritocratic, by verifying what job-seekers know and can do. It's a way of identifying talent, which is crucial for both companies and the millions of skilled yet underemployed workers in India.

Aspiring Minds is one of a growing number of firms that want to tap into the market for post-college workplace assessments. Many seek to measure noncognitive skills and problem-solving. Like Aspiring Minds, they typically feature adaptive elements, meaning the tests change based on a user's answers. The group includes Evolv, Gild and Knack.

Some startups seek to link

Sample Question

You work at an apparel store. A prospective customer, who lives nearby, comes to your store.
She wants to buy a shirt of a particular color which is currently not available in your store. You know that shirts of that color will arrive in a few days. Your store has shirts of a different color which is close to the color demanded by the customer. What shall be the first proposal you will make to the customer?

a. I will show her shirts of the alternate color and let her decide if she wants to buy the same.

b. I will tell her that if she pays for the shirt in advance, I will get it delivered to her home in a few days, when the new stock arrives.

c. I will tell her that shirts of the color she desires to buy would arrive in a few days and that I will inform her over the phone when the stock arrives.

d. I will tell her to consider buying a shirt of the alternate color since it is in greater demand than the one she wants. That is the reason why it is in stock too.

undergraduate students with employers. One new addition, JobVille, is described as a combination of Candy Crush (a popular Facebook game) and LinkedIn. Diana Cobbe, the startup's founder, recently won a $10,000 prize from the Lumina Foundation for the app.

Cobbe said that JobVille will introduce students, beginning as freshmen, to three types of jobs and one employer each day. "It takes about five minutes a day," said Cobbe. "They need to have employer networks."

Colleges should pay attention to this emerging field, said Louis Soares, vice president for policy research and strategy at the American Council on Education and head of the council's Center for Policy Analysis. For one thing, students might be able to benefit from the assessments. Companies are using them as hiring tools, he said, and colleges could steer students toward the tests and cover some or all of the fees.

Skills assessments are also worth tracking because of what they say about the value of a degree.

"It calls into question the current credentialing system," said Soares. "They upend conventional wisdom."

Different Type of Certificate

Major testing firms will continue to a play a role in developing job-market assessments.

In addition to ACT, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) has created two tests employers could use, although they are aimed at colleges. Another player is the Council for Aid to Education, which in 2013 released a revised version of its Collegiate Learning Assessment, which is dubbed the CLA+.

WorkKeys was one of the first on the scene. So far it has mostly been used in manufacturing and other fields that do not typically require job applicants to hold bachelor's degrees. But that may be changing.

The 11 WorkKeys assessments can be used by a broad range of employers, said Chris Guidry, ACT's director of career and college readiness. And ACT continues to tweak WorkKeys based on expected changes in job markets.

The testing firm designs its assessments based on specific information about local hiring needs. It uses job descriptions from a federal database as well as research from its own trained job profilers, who are deployed around the nation. They study the tasks and skills associated with jobs in each area, said Guidry.

The three types of assessments that see the most use are ones that measure reading for information, the ability to locate information and applied math skills. As a result, job-seekers who pass those assessments qualify for ACT's National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). They can earn one of three possible levels of readiness on the certificate. So far ACT has issued more than 2.6 million of the credentials.

In addition to those three tests, ACT offers eight assessments measuring different skills, including ones in applied technology, business writing and teamwork. Companies can offer the tests that make the most sense for their employees.

Guidry said some employers use the tests when they are seeking

to relocate to a new area. For example, the results can help "whittle down" 200 applications for 20 new jobs. Employers also test current employees, sometimes to remediate where their skills are lacking or to learn more about high-performing workers.
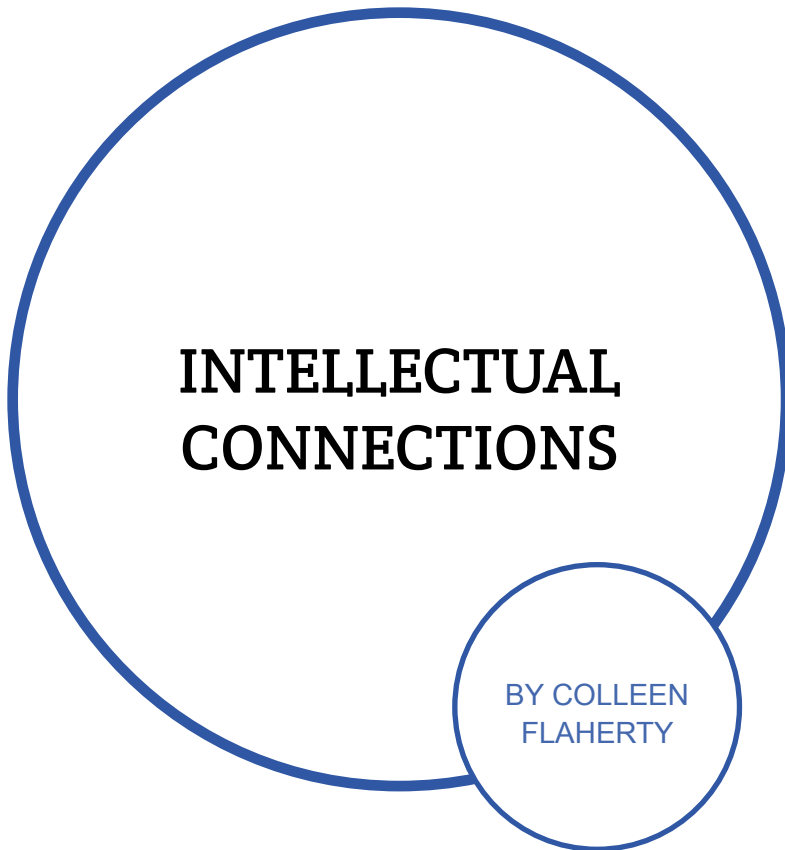
However, ACT does not recommend that employers rely solely on WorkKeys in the hiring process. And Guidry said companies typically allow applicants and current employees to retake the tests multiple times.

"It's not about excluding" anyone, he said. "People have good days. People have bad days." •

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/11/14/indian-companys-skills-test-college-graduates

INTELLECTUAL CONNECTIONS

BY COLLEEN FLAHERTY

Association of American Colleges and Universities highlights integrative liberal learning at annual meeting. But what is it?

WASHINGTON – Integrative learning. It sounds good, and it's a cornerstone of the Association of American Colleges and Universities' Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative to advance liberal education. But what is integrative learning, exactly, and how can liberal arts advocates use it to make their case for a broad education – especially in an increasingly jobs-focused environment? A series of sessions focused on that question in January 2015 at AAC&U's annual meeting here.

Most of AAC&U's essential learning outcomes for its LEAP initiative are pretty self-explanatory. Through a contemporary liberal arts education, students are supposed to gain knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world; intellectual and practical skills; and personal and social responsibility. But the last outcome, integrative and applied learning, is a little less obvious – even to educators in the liberal arts or or advocates of general education.

AAC&U describes integrative learning as "synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized skills," demonstrated through the application of "knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings

and complex problems." It's the kind of cross-disciplinary thinking or connection-making ability that the liberal arts are supposed to ingrain in students to prepare them for a career and the complexities of life – not just a first job. Put another way, it's the connective tissue between disciplines. But, administrators said in a session called "Helping Students Connect: Integrative Liberal Learning and the Future of Liberal Arts Colleges," faculty members don't always know what integrative learning is or how to impart it to their students.

"If faculty are not able to do this integrative work themselves, it's unlikely that they can model it," said Ann Ferren, a senior fellow at AAC&U who visited dozens of campuses to study integrative learning for the organization. "Faculty have to develop a capacity for it," by knowing what's going on elsewhere on campus, looking at other course syllabuses, and talking to students about internships and study abroad

experiences, for example.

Eleanor Townsley, a professor of sociology and associate dean of the faculty at Mount Holyoke College, said her institution redefined its curriculum based on the concept of integrative learning as a result of questions from parents and students about the value of a liberal arts education in the post-recession era, as well as participation in a Teagle Foundation- and Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded project on the topic. The idea was to center the undergraduate experience on a "curriculum-to-career model" that valued internships and cross-disciplinary experiences as more than just "add-ons." At the same time, the liberal arts curriculum wasn't watered down. It wasn't easy, she said – but it's turning out to be worth it.

"Faculty were split," Townsley said of reframing the curriculum around integrative learning and more "intentional" pathways through the liberal arts. Some faculty members rightly thought they already were doing some of this work already, and others didn't think they had much of a role to play, she said.

Despite the "hothouse political environment," administrators and faculty members involved in the project began by auditing "not-always-aligned" programs that offered experiential learning,

Townsley said. They also offered professional development retreats and strategic planning meetings, and supported any initiative that "brought students out beyond the gates." They began to help students Skype with alumnae and professionals, too.

Still, there was tension. During a seminar on integrative learning with 20 faculty members, Townsley said, "people were really frustrated with each other." Faculty members "didn't really know what other people were doing, and it got edgy," she added.

Later in 2012, there was a career summit centered around a hypothetical student named "Gabby" who kept falling through the cracks in her internships. That seemed to bring home the goal of the initiative to some faculty members, who kept invoking her name long after the seminar, Townsley said.

The program eventually ended up with a name: "The Lynk." And halfway through its second year, Mount Holyoke started to see "spontaneous curriculum innovation" among faculty members, and departments started to launch their own Lynk initiatives. They offered alumnae panels, career planning and credit for doing internship reflections.

"Communication was a challenge but it is getting better," Townsley said. Lessons learned include the importance of communicating

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"iteratively" with faculty members over time, using "honest" faculty brokers, and keeping to the faculty seminar tradition.

Two years out, Townsley said, she's seen a "cultural tipping point" in both faculty buy-in and student participation -- through greatly increased visits to the career center, for example.

Another session, called "Interdisciplinary Models That Support Interconnectivity," focused on faculty-based attempts at integrative learning. Erica Bastress-Dukeheart, associate professor of history and director of leadership in teaching and learning at Skidmore College, talked about a one-credit add-on seminar course aimed at increasing scientific literacy. She's taught the seminar for the past several years with three other faculty members across the disciplines. The first iteration, focused on the apocalypse, touched on plagues and people (Bastress-Dukeheart teaches medieval history); the post-apocalyptic world and sustainability; depictions of apocalypses in literature and movies; and "death from the skies," dealing with astronomy.

Bastress-Dukeheart said the logistics of planning were "messy," but each professor took on about 10-20 students, for a total of 67 students in the first year. But much more importantly, she said, both faculty members and students shared the "joys and dramas of crossing disciplinary boundaries," and sharing pedagogies. "And it was fun," she added. Topics since have included monsters and aliens.

Integrative learning was also the subtext of a panel for college presidents called "Higher Learning is Now Essential, But to What Ends? What Leaders Can Learn from National And State Advocacy Efforts for Liberal Education, the Liberal Arts and Educational Quality."

John Churchill, president of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, said his organization has focused increasingly on a "pithy" message that a liberal arts education "expands opportunity, drives ingenuity and innovation, and makes a strong investment in America" by preparing graduates for "all of life, and the follow-ups." It's "sound-byte" treatment of a "process that is intended to prepare people for a life of overwhelming complexity," he said.

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VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

OUTSIDE EXPERIENCE FOR ALL

BY JAKE NEW

Brown University starts effort to make sure every student can have an internship. Move comes as Cornell and Duke are providing students with more learning opportunities outside of the classroom.

Brown University launched a major new initiative in November 2014 aimed at providing internships, research opportunities, and funding to all freshmen, sophomores, and juniors -- particularly those from low-income backgrounds.

Called BrownConnect, the program began with a pilot phase in 2013 and has already created 154 new internship opportunities, the university said. It has also provided financial support for 254 interns in low-paid or unpaid internships.

"Education has to be more than a series of courses taken over four years," Christina Paxson, Brown's president, said. "Outside experience is just as valuable. Internships are how most students find jobs. But if we don't provide ways to support our students while they're getting that outside experience, especially those who cannot afford to take unpaid opportunities, they can't be as successful as we want them to be."

As colleges face more pressure to prove their worth – and for parents that proof often comes in the form of their children finding work after graduation – more institutions are putting resources into initiatives like BrownConnect that seek to provide "real-world" experience to students.

Michael True, a member of the Washington Internship Institute's board of directors, said colleges are increasingly taking a more active interest in directly helping students participate in internships and other kinds of experiential learning.
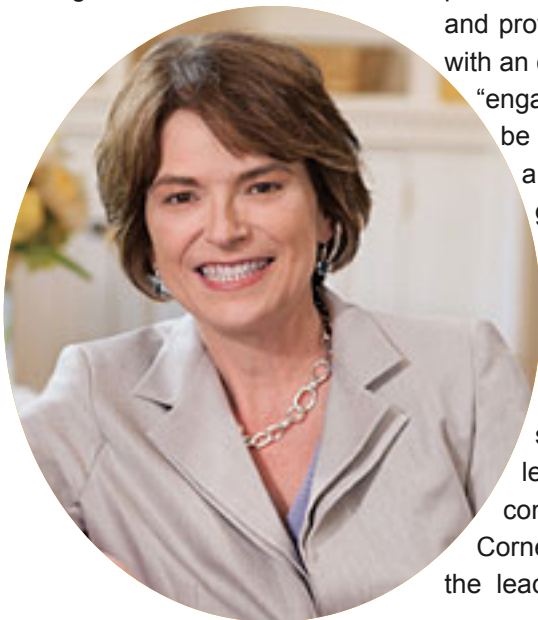
"It's really accelerated in the last five years," True said. "Colleges helping students find internships is a growing trend. Schools raising money to fund unpaid internships is a growing trend. Use of alumni in this way is a growing trend. All of this is on the upswing because it all makes it that much easier for students to transition to the workplace. Parents today want their students to pursue what interests them but they also want colleges to find a way to make sure that those courses will pay off in the end financially."

Some colleges have had co-op programs -- in which students alternate between instructions and internships -- for years. But

the recent interest by many top colleges and universities goes beyond internships, and includes other efforts to focus on out-of-class experiences. Many colleges want to be sure that students get not just internships, but good internships. A survey released by Gallup in November 2014 is the latest to suggest that many internships are less than ideal. The study of college graduates found that only about one in three who graduated in the past four years strongly agreed they had an internship or job that allowed them to apply what they were learning in the classroom.

Engagement Efforts

In 2007, Duke University announced that it was launching a $30 million project that would provide financial support to any undergraduates who wanted to design and carry out service projects around the world. So far more than 2,800 Duke students have participated in the program, which covers both travel and living expenses. "Education finally isn't about doing homework -- it's about actively desiring to use your personal knowledge to accomplish something in the world," Richard Brodhead, Duke's president, said at the time.

Cornell launched a similarly civic-minded initiative called Engaged Cornell. The $150-million project is expected to develop "hundreds of new community-university partnerships around the world" and provide every Cornell student with an opportunity for what it calls "engaged learning." This could be an internship or it could be a trip to India to learn about global health. Students are not required to participate, but the university said it is aiming for 100 percent participation by 2025.

"It's about placing students and what they're learning in a real-world context," said Judy Appleton, Cornell's vice provost and the leader of the initiative. "This

generation of students seems to just be more oriented toward that type of learning."

Providing support for that type of learning has been a priority at Brown, Paxson said, since she became president in 2012. It was a core part of a strategic plan that she introduced in 2013, and she created a committee of alumni and parents to explore how the task could be accomplished. Following the White House's College Pipeline summit in 2014, the university also announced that it would provide funding and internships to every Brown student who receives need-based aid. BrownConnect is an extension of those efforts.

A new website that Paxson described as a "one-stop shop" allows students to search for internship and research

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opportunities across the country, connect with Brown alumni to receive career advice, and explore what kinds of financial support the university offers for low-paid and unpaid internships and research positions.

Employers can post internship openings on the website for students to find, and alumni, family members, and other donors can also provide funding through the site. Alumni will be a key part of the initiative, which is so far primarily funded through donations, Paxson said.

"We've already found that a lot of alumni would like to be a part of this," she said. "It's been mostly donor-driven, and we've already been able to make significant expansions in financial support. We're not sure yet what the total cost will be once this is up and running, but the idea is that the more successful we are at finding paid internships for Brown students, the less money we'll have to raise for financial support."

Brown is turning to alumni for help there, too, encouraging them to be active participants on the site and in hiring Brown students as interns.

Mike Baker, the president of Big Data company DataXu, said that when he graduated from Brown, he went through several short jobs, not knowing what career he wanted to pursue. It was a "costly, friction-filled experience," he said, and one he hopes BrownConnect can help today's graduates avoid.

"What the university is trying to do is get more alumni to list internships and convince those who are for-profits to pay those interns," Baker said. "For alumni like myself, it's giving us direct access to students who are really bright and who maybe hadn't thought about interning at a place like a Big Data company. We're trying before were buying. For students, it's a way to test out some of their interests and get a more informed view of career choices."

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/11/13/brown-launches-initiative-aimed-providing-internships-low-income-students

NEW APPROACH TO TRANSFER

BY PAUL FAIN

A multistate transfer agreement is based on proficiency rather than course credits, which might open the door further for models that do not rely on seat time.

A group of 16 public institutions in four Western states have agreed to a transfer agreement based on what students know rather than on the courses they have taken or the credits they have earned.

The Interstate Passport Initiative, which the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) unveiled in January 2014, is a set of mutually agreed-upon learning outcomes for lower division courses in the general education core.

Students can now transfer from one participating institution to another – even across state lines – and bring their outcomes, or competencies, with them.

Colleges on either side of the process determine which courses and credits equate with proficiency in the learning objectives. And the receiving institution gets to decide which credits a transfer student should earn for his or her proven proficiency (see box on following page for a list of participating institutions).

"Some institutions may require two or more courses to meet a single outcome while another institution may only require one course," according to WICHE's website description of the project, "but each institution will understand the composition of the block at every other institution."

Beyond its potential impact at participating colleges, the project is important for what it signals about transfer and the credit hour.

Higher education's central currency for more than a century has been credits earned for specific courses. But the passport, which was created by dozens of academics with plenty of input from registrars and other technical experts, goes beyond the credit hour with a framework of required learning concepts.

As a result, the passport could contribute to the "unbundling" of higher education, where assessed learning typically trumps time spent in the traditional classroom.

"If this works, it could open the door to prior-learning assessment," said Susan Albertine, vice president of diversity, equity and student success at the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Related approaches, such as competency-based education or digital badges, could also get a boost.

The main impetus for the passport is to create a more efficient transfer process. Many transfer students – particularly those who move from community colleges to four-year institutions – spend time and money retaking courses after transferring.

For example, the average transfer student takes more than a year longer than non-transfer students to earn a bachelor's degree, spending an extra $9,000 in the process, according to federal data. While some states have worked on this issue within their own borders, WICHE's regional approach could help the 27 percent of transfer students who cross state lines.

"We simply must streamline the transfer process for students. And we must do so in a way that ensures the quality and integrity of the degrees we ultimately provide," said David Longanecker, WICHE's president, in a written statement. "The passport achieves this by guaranteeing both the value of the credits received and the competencies developed by students."

'Revolutionary' Effort?

The pilot project is fairly limited. The three learning areas it focuses on are oral communication, written communication and quantitative literacy. The agreed-upon outcomes in each area can translate into course equivalencies in mathematics, English, writing and communications.

As a result, the passport's competencies cover a relatively small slice of a typical undergraduate degree's general education requirement. But the project's leaders want to add outcomes for other disciplines.

"The hope is that we will be able to build it out," said Albertine. She said the ultimate goal is a complete, transferable general education core based solely on learning outcomes.

A $550,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporate of New York has paid for the project so far. WICHE is currently looking for a funder to continue supporting the work.

"In the second phase we'll tackle the sciences, critical thinking and the humanities," said Patricia Shea, the project's director, who also directs WICHE's alliance of community college leaders.

Academics and administrators from California have been heavily involved in the project, but have not yet signed on to the passport.

Ken O'Donnell, associate dean for academic programs and policy for the California State University System, said the system plans to ramp up its participation in the effort. Given the massive scope of Cal State and California's community colleges, a focus on competencies for transfer in the state would be a major development.

The project's leaders hope many more colleges and state higher education systems will participate.

Participating Institutions

Hawaii
- Leeward Community College
- University of Hawaii West Oahu

North Dakota
- Lake Region State College
- North Dakota State University
- North Dakota State College of Science
- Valley City State University

Oregon
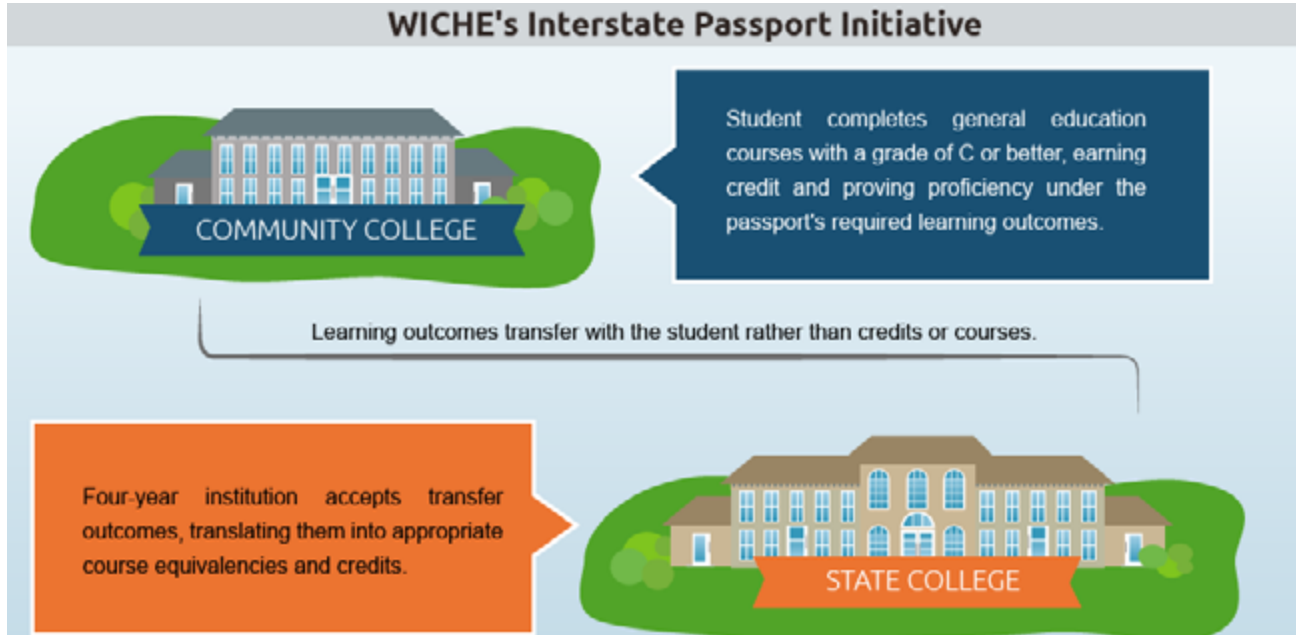- Blue Mountain Community College
- Eastern Oregon University

Utah
- Dixie State College of Utah
- Salt Lake Community College
- Snow College
- Southern Utah University
- The University of Utah
- Utah State University
- Utah Valley University
- Weber State University

WICHE's Interstate Passport Initiative

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Student completes general education courses with a grade of C or better, earning credit and proving proficiency under the passport's required learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes transfer with the student rather than credits or courses.

Four-year institution accepts transfer outcomes, translating them into appropriate course equivalencies and credits.

STATE COLLEGE

"We want to do it and we're confident that we can," said Albertine, who has been involved in the work, which draws heavily from her association's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) project. The passport's three main learning outcomes came from the LEAP project. It also has similarities with the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile and the Tuning project.

By creating the passport, Albertine said, "We thought we were doing something revolutionary."

Demonstrated Proficiency

The project began quietly more than three years ago. A group of college provosts first hatched the idea to create transfer pathways based on students' competencies.

While trendy, academic programs based on competencies

are not new. Neither is the concept of "block" transfers. Colleges have long matched up groupings of courses – checking boxes for general education requirements – as part of their transfer articulation agreements.

This approach is different, however, because the common currency is learning outcomes, not courses.

"If you're all working on the same outcomes," said Albertine, "you can go in all sorts of different directions and still get there."

Trust is important for this novel form of transfer to work, according to the project's leaders. It also requires a tremendous amount of technical know-how, experts said, which is why the tech-savvy WICHE made sense as a host for the work.

O'Donnell said colleges have developed myriad administrative

systems that rely on the credit hour, including registrars' offices and IT platforms. So shifting transfer criteria to learning outcomes isn't easy.

"That whole machine needs to turn," he said.

The passport is backed by detailed information describing what, exactly, are the agreed-upon transfer-level proficiency criteria for the outcomes. That can be trickier than just matching up two similar courses at different colleges. Faculty members at participating institutions worked together to develop the criteria.

The passport agreement does not require specific forms of assessment. Institutions make the call on how best to determine whether a student is proficient. But a student must be deemed proficient in each outcome to earn successful transfer status in one

of the three overarching learning areas -- oral communication, written communication and quantitative literacy.

For example, there are six learning outcome features under the passport's definition of quantitative literacy: computational skills, communication of quantitative arguments, analysis of quantitative arguments, formulation of quantitative arguments, mathematical process and quantitative models.

The definition of mathematical process (to choose one) is for a student to be able to "design and follow a multi-step mathematical process through to a logical conclusion and critically evaluate the reasonableness of the result."

That outcome is also undergirded by a description of the various ways a student can demonstrate transfer-level proficiency. For example, she can successfully use "synthetic division, factoring, graphing and other related techniques to find all the (real) zeroes of a suitable cubic/quartic polynomial."

Sounds Simple, Right?

However, students don't need to master every specific proficiency criterion. The passport's criteria are examples of the "behaviors that a student will display when she

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WE SIMPLY MUST STREAMLINE THE TRANSFER PROCESS FOR STUDENTS. AND WE MUST DO SO IN A WAY THAT ENSURES THE QUALITY AND INTEGRITY OF THE DEGREES WE ULTIMATELY PROVIDE. THE PASSPORT ACHIEVES THIS BY GUARANTEEING BOTH THE VALUE OF THE CREDITS RECEIVED AND THE COMPETENCIES DEVELOPED BY STUDENTS.

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has attained adequate proficiency to succeed in her academic endeavors after transferring to another passport institution," according to WICHE's website.

The next step is transfer. Say the student earned her proficiency at Utah's Salt Lake Community College by receiving a grade of "C" or better in math 1040, which is statistics. She could then use the passport to transfer to the University of Utah and earn credit from the university for math 1030, which is quantitative literacy.

Participating institutions plan to do plenty of heavy lifting to track how the passport shakes out. They will collect data about transfer students in the pilot project and plan to send that information to the National Student Clearinghouse. (Utah State University is serving as the passport's central data

repository for now.) This will allow colleges to test how the students who received credit under the passport performed in subsequent courses, and to compare their performance to other students.

Several experts involved in the work think the approach to transfer has the potential for much wider adoption.

College transcripts are woefully inadequate at depicting student learning, said O'Connell, citing a widely held belief. He said the passport, however, is a "way of organizing what students know instead of what we told them."

Many forces are pushing higher education to a more outcomes-based approach. As a result, O'Connell said the broader use of proficiencies for transfer credit is not only feasible, but "in a sense inevitable."   •

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE   https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/09/wiche-transfer-passport-based-proficiency-rather-credits

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VIEWS

A selection of essays and op-eds about recruiting international students

A FALSE CHOICE

BY GLORIA
CORDES LARSON

Students and the colleges that teach them need not focus on only hard and soft skills, writes Gloria Cordes Larson.

There has been extensive hand-wringing about what can be done to help young graduates succeed in today's tough labor market – especially in the spring, as high school seniors decide on their college offers, and college seniors prepare to graduate and face the world. Unemployment and underemployment rates among recent college graduates in the United States – largely a result of the recession's lingering damage – are too high. And we've all seen the headlines questioning the value of college and the surveys that show employers bemoaning the "preparedness gap."

But I am full of optimism.

As a university president, I spend far too much time among skilled, talented, motivated young people to be anything but hopeful about the future of higher education and the capabilities of the millennial generation – those born roughly between the early 1980s and the early 2000s. And honestly, surveys by my institution, Bentley University, of recruiters and students don't reflect these headlines.

It's perplexing. Is there such a disconnect to good jobs with this generation? And if there is one, let's figure out how to resolve it instead of repeatedly touting the problem. So we chose to dig a little deeper and try to uncover the real issues. How do key stakeholders actually view the preparedness issue? And, more important, what will it take to ensure that millennials are fully prepared to succeed in the workplace?

We commissioned KRC Research to conduct a comprehensive preparedness survey of over 3,000 stakeholders, including employers, higher

education leaders, students, parents, and recent college graduates. The survey found consensus in surprising places -- from rating recent graduates' level of workforce preparedness to defining exactly what preparedness means.

One of the most interesting set of findings revealed that businesses are conflicted about the skills they want in their new employees and, consequently, are sending mixed messages to the marketplace. A majority of business decision-makers and corporate recruiters say that hard and soft skills are equally important for success in the workplace. (Hard skills are tangible ones, such as a student's technical and professional skills, while soft skills include communicating well, teamwork and patience.)

Yet when asked to assess the importance of a comprehensive set of individual skills, business leaders put soft skills at the top of their list and industry and job-specific skills at the bottom; only 40 percent of employers say that the latter are important to workplace success. But while employers say soft skills are vital to long-term career success, they prefer to hire candidates with the industry-specific skills needed to hit the ground running, even if those candidates have less potential for future growth.

In the face of such conflicting information from employers, how should students and educators respond? Should they emphasize soft skills or hard skills?

The answer: This is a false choice. Students don't need to – and shouldn't have to – choose between hard and soft skills. It's important for colleges to arm students with both skill sets -- whether a student is majoring in business or literature. By developing curriculums that fuse liberal arts and professional skills and by providing hands-on learning experiences, we can give our students the range of skills that are critical for the modern workplace.

This "fusion" was one of the popular solutions tested in the survey, and many schools are doing it already. Brandeis University, a private uni-versity with a liberal arts focus, says that its new under-graduate business program is already one of its most popular majors. (Brandeis points out that most of its business majors are double majors.) At West Virginia University, the College

of Business and Economics and the School of Public Health have partnered to create a dual-degree program that will infuse business skills into the field of public health. At Georgetown's McDonough School of Business, students in the freshman "Ethics of Entrepreneurship" seminar take on a semesterlong project designed to help them flex their critical thinking and writing muscles in a global and social framework.

Bentley has also adopted several strategies to ensure we are preparing our students for success. Virtually every student here majors or minors in business, while simultaneously pursuing a core of arts and sciences courses that focus on expanding and inspiring traditional "business" thinking. We recently expanded on our popular liberal studies major, an optional second major combined with a business major, by launching six-credit "fusion" courses co-taught by business and arts and sciences faculty.

Combinations include a management course (Interpersonal Relations in Management) with an English course (Women and Film) to explore how women are perceived in film and how this can affect management styles; and a global studies course (U.S. Government and Politics) with an economics course (Macroeconomics) to teach how politics and economics work together and to demonstrate that understanding both is often essential to doing either one well.

All this study must be combined with hands-on, "experiential" learning – the pathway to hard skills. This is where business organizations can play an important role.

Santander, the global, multinational bank, created a scholarship program to support academic, research, and technological projects – we are proud to be one of the 800 institutions in their program. Corporate partners can also help shape curriculums to teach skills as they are actually practiced in the workplace. EY LLP (formerly Ernst and Young) worked closely with us to merge accounting and finance for freshmen and sophomores, since those disciplines are inextricably linked in the business environment.

These strategies aim to equip students with both hard and soft skills and they can be adopted and adapted by many colleges. A challenge in higher education is that some academic models can be so discipline-specific that students miss out on cross-disciplinary opportunities to integrate their knowledge. But it doesn't have to work this way.

Like other colleges and universities that are innovating and experimenting, we are seeing returns on this curricular investment.

One way to measure this: our survey of the Class of 2013 shows that 98 percent of responding graduates are employed or attending graduate school full time (this includes information from 95 percent of the class). Retention, number and availability of internships and repayment of student debt are also key metrics.

I encourage my higher education colleagues to refocus their attention on the ways we can work together to strengthen our education models.

Millennials, a group that includes our current students, are counting on us to prepare them for successful careers and life. And in the long run, it is an economic imperative that we do so.   •

Gloria Cordes Larson is president of Bentley University.

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WORK READY OR NOT

BY PETER STOKES

Peter Stokes explores the mismatch in information and results between colleges and the employment market.

R ecently, the McKinsey Center for Government released the second in its "Education to Employment" series of the reports. The first, "Education to Employment: Designing a System that Works," released in December 2012, looked at global youth unemployment challenges and the roles of higher education institutions and employers in helping students to make the transition from one domain to the other more successfully. The second report, "Education to Employment: Getting Europe's Youth into Work," released in January of 2014, takes a geographically more narrow look at the same issues, and makes some practical recommendations for addressing the so-called skills gap currently vexing many European nations.

The report is timely, and relevant not only to all who are concerned about the prospect of a "lost generation" of European youth but also to those of us concerned with the college-to-work transition here in the U.S., and the potential long-term effects of underemployment and unemployment.

I was reminded of this very recently while conducting a brief survey of employers myself. In one question, the survey presented the respondents with a list of more than a dozen institutional characteristics and asked how important each of those characteristics is to their selection of preferred providers for recruiting full-time hires. Included in the list of characteristics were things like geographic location, diversity of the student body, institutional rankings, selectivity, and so forth.

The number one issue wasn't any of those, however. Far and away, the most important characteristic, survey respondents indicated, is the work readiness of graduates, with 91 percent of respondents calling this important or very important.

By contrast, only 44 percent of respondents called institutional rankings important or very important. In the current economy, employers may be more inclined to measure colleges and universities by the results they produce rather than by their reputations.

As usual, Shakespeare may

have put it best when he said, "the readiness is all."

One of the problems with fostering work readiness, of course, as the McKinsey report points out, is the difficulty of getting diverse constituencies to agree on what readiness looks like. The results of McKinsey's European survey are telling: "74 percent of education providers were confident that their graduates were prepared for work, yet only 38 percent of youth and 35 percent of employers agreed."

In response to this misalignment, the McKinsey report offers some sensible advice: "To improve student prospects, education providers could work more closely with employers to make sure that they are offering courses that really help young people prepare for the workplace." While the youth employment situation here in the U.S. is nowhere near as desperate as in many parts of Europe, the advice nevertheless has relevance here at home, too.

Of course, it's equally true that employers need to work more closely with education providers in order to achieve the best results. McKinsey's 2012 report makes the need for this kind of two-way dialogue explicit, arguing that a genuine solution to the skills gap requires a form of collaboration where education providers and employers "actively step into one another's worlds," so that the "education-to-employment journey is treated as a continuum."

There may be some within the higher education community who feel corporations are not doing enough, and I have heard people argue that employers are spending less on training than in the past, and trying to force colleges and universities to pick up the tab. The data, however, suggest otherwise. According to Bersin by Deloitte, a firm that tracks corporate training expenditures, domestic investments in training have grown from a recent low of approximately $47 billion in 2009 to $70 billion in 2013 – with double-digit growth over each of the last three years. That's not to say that corporations shouldn't be doing more to collaborate with higher education providers, of course – they should, particularly if we hope to arrive at a better matching of recent graduates to jobs is the desired outcome.

Certainly the work of producing a match between a recent graduate and a job opening is no easy matter. For some already in the workforce, it may well have been that innate passions and native talents aligned serendipitously with the workforce needs of industry. But for many others, careers may have been more likely to resemble careens along a complicated and cobbled path of discovery, with seemingly unpredictable outcomes.

In a world of perfect information, matchmaking would be easy. Students would have ready access to market data on jobs and salaries, and the task of connecting particular degree programs to those jobs would be straightforward.

These students would make wise choices about what to study, put in strong academic performances, obtain credible real-world experience through internships, service learning opportunities, or co-ops, and, aided by focused career services offices, they would transition seamlessly to in-demand professions upon graduation.

Alas, at times it seems that un-readiness is all. Despite the efforts of a few information sources (the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, Burning Glass, and EMSI come to mind), market data may too rarely find their way into the hands of students and their families.

Colleges and universities may still offer degree programs with uncertain linkages to job opportunities (and I'm not taking potshots at the liberal arts here, as there are many professional programs that are poorly aligned with regional job prospects). Students may make poor choices and perform poorly in their chosen fields of study. They may graduate with little in the way of practical, hands-on work experience and, after a brief faculty critique of the resume, end up fending for themselves in the vastness of online jobs boards.

How can we redress this kind of mismatching?

Sadly, for some higher education institutions, the response is occasionally exactly what you'd expect – more school! So they entice students back to the bachelor's completion program to complement the associate degree, or to the graduate certificate program or master's degree. Sometimes this works.

Having gone through the school of hard knocks, students now make wiser choices. But in some instances, more of the same merely exacerbates the original problem.

Given the priority that employers assign to work readiness, and the observable mismatches between students capabilities and the skills many employers seek, it isn't surprising to see a growing number of commercial ventures attempting to fill the breach with a wide variety of services – training programs, coding academies, networking websites, and experiential learning opportunities. Just scan the education press for names like Dream Careers, Envoys, Fullbridge, Koru, Hack Reactor, Coursolve, Intern Sushi, Collegefeed, Rad Matter, and many, many more.

McKinsey's suggestion that education providers work more closely with employers is sound advice.

At the moment, a burgeoning group of commercial education providers seem to be taking this advice to heart, and traditional colleges may have something to learn from them – particularly at a moment when it makes all the difference whether their graduates are work-ready or not. •

Peter Stokes is executive director of postsecondary innovation in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University.

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE   https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/04/04/addressing-mismatch-between-colleges-and-job-market-essay

'COMPETENCY' AND RESIDENTIAL COLLEGES

BY W. KENT BARNDS

Rather than dismiss competency-based education as shallow, colleges that emphasize the physical campus should work to document the learning that can occur only in that setting, writes W. Kent Barnds.

*I*n 2013 The Atlantic predicted that one of the top five trends impacting higher education will be a push toward credit given for experience, proficiency and documented "competency." The results of Inside Higher Ed's 2014 survey of chief academic officers also show openness to competency-based outcomes.

For many, myself included, this simply sounds like a series of placement tests and seems like a pretty shallow approach to a college education and degree. However, as vice president of enrollment and chief marketing officer for a residential college, I can't ignore the appeal of the "validation" of learning this trend suggests.

In fact, I find myself thinking more and more about how residential colleges, with their distinct missions, might respond to the potential threat this trend represents. I find myself hoping we can prove the residential environment results in valuable learning and life experiences beyond getting along with a roommate, asking someone on a date, learning how to tap a keg and configuring a renegade wireless network.

We can do more. Perhaps the idea of competency-based education should inspire us to think differently about how the learning environment of the residential experience is superior. Perhaps there are competencies associated with a residential college we've not done an adequate job of documenting?

This will not be easy for most of us. Our natural instinct to "wait and see how good our students turn out" to justify why students should live and learn on campus won't work this time, as we face a skeptical public and witness more and more college presidents, administrators and boards reconsidering the value of online education. With some intentionality, we can do a much better job of proving why learning in a residential setting is superior.

We need to ask ourselves: Why is the residential campus experience of utmost importance

to a contemporary undergraduate education? We must identify the sorts of learning that can only occur in such a setting, and validate, or better identify, the learning competencies that occur outside the classroom on a residential campus.

This will be difficult in an environment defined by shrinking resources, when many resort to thinking about eliminating activities considered not central to the core mission. The instinct is to cut, de-emphasize or keep separate and second. We see this time and time again in any setting that faces difficult choices about resources. But investment, integration and intentionality create a better path forward.

Can liberal arts colleges resist the urge to cut, and rethink how activities in the residential environment are central to the core mission? Can these colleges develop meaningful ways of measuring the value and impact of such activities and how they result in competencies that add value and worth? Can residential liberal arts colleges develop a "currency" that demonstrates they value out-of-classroom learning comparably to in-classroom learning? I hope so.

While many colleges would benefit from integrating out-of-classroom learning, residential liberal arts colleges must do so because of the infrastructure around which our colleges have been built -- residence and dining halls, student activity centers, athletic venues and performance halls. We need to prove these are not just modern amenities, but central to superior learning.

To validate this learning experience, residential liberal arts colleges will need to rethink historic barriers. Learning that occurs outside the classroom can no longer be viewed as "separate and second."

Extra-curricular and co-curricular transcripts that fully document competencies and outcomes essential to success beyond college must evolve to be fully integrated with the academic program, and valued both internally and externally.

First, residential liberal arts colleges must clearly define the learning outcomes and expectations. This is frequently a faculty-driven exercise. Understanding the knowledge gained from an activity provides a framework around which out-of-classroom learning can be developed. This framework will allow for alignment of purpose and some measure of control about how central an out-of-classroom activity is to the core mission and which competencies are satisfied as a result.

Georgetown University was recently recognized for its excellent pro-gramming in the area of preparing student-athletes for leadership. Recognition of activities that successfully align with and even expand learning is critical for the public to be convinced that such activities are core to a high-quality education.

Next, residential liberal arts colleges must create a "currency" that meaningfully recognizes those activities that advance a student's education, e.g., elective academic credit, a credit-bearing on-campus

internship, or certificate for activities that demonstrate substantive interest and professional and personal development.

Student activities might be reorganized into mission-focused areas that provide students with experience not always fully represented in the academic program, but with relevance to a successful application for employment or graduate school.

Some examples might be: Leadership, Teamwork, Civic Engagement, Social Justice, Service Learning, Entrepreneurship and Business Development, Inter-cultural Understanding, Interfaith and Spiritual Development, Public Relations and Event Planning, and Sustainability.

This approach is similar to competency-based certification, but broader than proof that a student can read a balance sheet or do a 10-minute presentation.

Finally, liberal arts colleges should engage in a broader conversation about why they are residential, without saying it's because they've been that way for 150 years. Too many colleges assume students already understand.

Such a learning environment can positively shape a student's character and skillset, and result in sweeter success, but a residential community does not always acknowledge or articulate this success.

With competency-based edu-cation in the spotlight, residential colleges have an opportunity to renew a focus on the benefits to students who not only eat and sleep on physical campuses, but also meet colleagues, connect with mentors, challenge themselves in new ways, and develop 21st-century skills and competencies on campus.

If we do not champion and clearly identify the benefits to our students, we are vulnerable to the advocates of no-frills bachelor's degrees, willy-nilly life experience for credit, online learning, and the commodifiers among us who believe the value of the college experience is test- and content-driven, rather than experiential and residential in nature.   •

W. Kent Barnds is executive vice president and vice president of enrollment, communication and planning at Augustana College, in Rock Island, Ill.

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/02/07/residential-colleges-should-use-competency-their-own-purposes-essay

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