



OFFICE OF THE PROVOST
Digital and Lifelong Learning

SPOTLIGHT ON SKILLS:
**BADGING USAGE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

*An analysis of badging administration
and badging trends in higher education*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Badging as an Option Among Larger Alternative Credentials Portfolio

Non-degree credentials receive different names, but most ultimately provide the same value: fast and focused education and training. Badging is one option among a suite of alternative credentialing options (see page 4). University stakeholders should think holistically about the various opportunities for alternative credentials and how badging fits within the larger alternative credential portfolio.

Learner-Centered Programming Instead of Credential-Centered Programming

Rather than choosing a credential to launch and hoping it finds an audience, it's important to determine the audience a program will serve and build the offering to meet their needs. Having learner-centric programming instead of credential-centric programming ensures the offering matches the audience's needs. Audience segments to consider in programming include working professional who are:

- Upskilling in place
- Seeking promotion
- Facing replacement
- Returning to the workforce
- Preparing for a switch
- Pursuing a passion

Operationalizing and Centralizing Badging Opportunities

Colleges and universities who are leaders in badging have developed robust internal operations to support badging initiatives (pp. 9-10). This typically includes a centralized unit that supports badging on behalf of the university as well as a website hosted by the centralized unit. The website is especially important, as it serves many purposes including educating internal and external stakeholders on the value of badging, instructing badging recipients on how to display their badge and talk about skill attainment in the workforce, opportunities for faculty members to request new badging opportunities, etc.

Higher Education Trends in Badging

As the alternative credentialing ecosystem matures, institutions are thinking more strategically and increasing their sophistication with badging initiatives. Innovations include an increased emphasis in stackable badges instead of one-off, standalone badges; growth in badging partnerships between industry/corporations and higher education institutions; and an increase in noncredit-to-credit pathways, where learners find an “on-ramp” to traditional degree attainment by starting with noncredit learning opportunities.

COVID-19 Accelerating Badging Initiatives in Higher Education

There has been an increase in badging attainment during COVID-19 as working professionals look for ways to upskill quickly and digitally. While workforce hiring methods have largely gone digital, granular skill attainment illustrated by digital badges could set candidates apart from other applicants. Additionally, as more jobs become permanently remote, the need for digital upskilling in the workforce will increase.

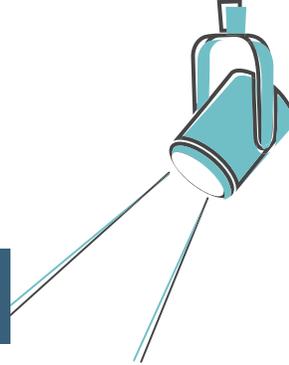


ALTERNATIVE CREDENTIAL LANDSCAPE

There are many options for alternative credentials, but each offers an opportunity to illustrate rapid learning and skill attainment. Each of the options for alternative credentialing below serve a specific purpose and should have a specific audience in mind. Higher education institutions that are leaders in the alternative credentialing space think holistically about their alternative credential options and allow learners a variety of “on ramps” and “off ramps” as they continue their education. Most importantly, learners must leave programs able to articulate and demonstrate the skills gained by non-degree programs. While alternative credentials are becoming more mainstream, there is still uneven awareness among employers and industries of their purpose or value.

PROGRAM	DEFINITION	TYPICAL DURATION
Badging	Entirely digital credential typically signaling mastery of a single skill. Badges more easily communicate value when tied to concrete skill (ex: CSS).	No set length; wide variety of badges and organizations offering them
Certificate	A set of credit-bearing or non-credit courses on a particular topic (usually between 3 and 10). Certificates can “stack” into related degrees, meaning completed coursework transfers into degree requirements. This is most common for graduate course certificates, which then stack into a master’s degree.	There is no set length for a certificate, though most can be completed in under a year.
MicroMasters	A series of 4–8 graduate-level courses offered by edX and a university partner. Courses can function as a standalone credential, similar to a certificate, or apply to the curriculum of a related master’s degree at the partner university.	8 weeks per course, 8–16 months total
Nanodegree	A series of project-based courses offered by Udacity. Nanodegree curricula often closely align to employer needs. Nanodegrees are not offered in partnership with universities.	6–12 months

SPOTLIGHT ON BADGING



BADGE DIFFERENTIATORS

Badges have two key characteristics that make them different from the larger portfolio of alternative credentials:

- They **focus on singular skills and competencies**, such as communication and writing.
- They primarily **exist in a digital format**. Badges are meant to be easily shared on digital platforms to display and endorse students' abilities.

Badges look to solve a problem that adults seeking employment or promotion tend to face: The need for demonstrated short, concrete, and skill-based programs. If a candidate applies for a job needing a specific skill, they may look to quickly earn a credential that displays skill mastery.

Once employed, professionals must continuously develop their skills in response to technological advancement. If successful, badges allow professionals to learn a skill quickly and display it on their resume or HR records without investing in lengthy or costly degree programs.

DEFINING THE NEED

- **50% of all employees will need reskilling by 2025**, as adoption of technology increases, according to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report.
- Respondents to the Future of Jobs Survey estimate that around **40% of workers will require reskilling of six months or less**.
- Employers less often fund degree attainment, and instead **prefer to support employee education internally** for greater alignment to organizational needs. Badges offer employers a tangible award for training completion.
- **Nearly 70% of learners want to fill education gaps with alternative or non-degree credentials**, according to research by Modern Campus.
- **71% of higher education administrators agree that development of new credentials is critical to their institution's revenue and enrollment goals**, according to research by UPCEA and Modern Campus.

BADGE FORMATS

- Standalone badges: One-off badges awarded through noncredit learning opportunities
 - » Example: Boston University: [Business Analytics Foundations](#)
- Stackable badges: Series of badges leading to increased mastery around a skillset/topic
 - » Example: Marist College: [Teaching Tech – Belding Synchronous and Beyond](#)
- Employer-aligned badges: Either offered in industry or alongside institution, typically recognizing masters of IT skills and technology
 - » Example: [IBM digital badges](#)
- Integrated badges: Awarded to students in professional courses to demonstrate skills learned alongside academic credit
 - » Example: St John's University: [Advertising Communication](#)

CURRENT MARKET TRENDS FOR DIGITAL BADGES

- **Technology, healthcare, and finance** are industries that are most utilizing and recognizing badging in the workforce.
- Companies such as IBM, Salesforce, and Ernst & Young have developed their own badging initiatives. **IBM alone doubled the number of badges issued year over year in a two-week span between April 1–April 15, 2021**, due to the increased demand in digital skill attainment during COVID-19.
- **Digital badges market size set to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 22.5% from 2021 to 2026**, estimated to reach \$292.2 million by 2025.
- **The academic segment has been elevating as the primary market for digital badges.** This is largely due to an increase in promoting credentials as a way for teachers and others to gain professional education in various topics.
- An increased emphasis in developing badging around **in-demand soft skills needed for the future of work**, such as analytical thinking and innovation, creativity, leadership, resilience, etc. These topics can be best addressed in short courses and digital badges.
- **Increase in co-curricular badging and stackable badging credentials** rather than one-off, standalone badges (see below).

A Model for the Future? A Stackable Credentials Pathway

A stackable credentials pathway allows for competencies to be converted into courses that build up into for credit or non credit programs



*Courtesy UPCEA, "An Update on Microcredentials and Digital Badges," September 2020

INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS IN BADGING¹

INSTITUTION	BADGING PARTNER	COMMENTS
Marist University	Credly	Administered in School of Professional Programs, 8 topics where badges can be earned, 2 levels for each badge, can be used toward undergraduate degree plan or stand-alone
Capella University	Credly	Theory course can be started at any point, two-day skills review immersion on campus prior to clinical. Each section (theory, immersion, clinical) is \$800. Books not included.
St. John's University	Credly	Administered in College of Professional Studies, badge receipt coincides with undergraduate course completion
University of Notre Dame	OpenBadges	Mix of co-curricular badges for students in undergraduate/graduate programs and open badges available to the larger community
Wichita State University	Credly	Majority of badges are co-curricular
University at Buffalo	Credly	Administered in Office of Microcredentials, stackable, earned through credit and noncredit courses, badging leader due to early buy-in and centralization
Boston University	Credly	Badges available in noncredit professional development, largely in executive education programs
Creighton University	N/A	Badges offered in executive education program among five topics: communication, lifestyle medicine, negotiation and conflict resolution, technology and innovation, project management
Harvard University	Multiple	Badges available for noncredit opportunities through Harvard Business Publishing Education , and the HarvardX platform (certificates only)
The University of Utah	Credly	Badges available for noncredit, professional education opportunities, administered through the Continuing Education department
Santa Barbara City College	Credly	Administered through the "Career Skills Institute," badges are offered for noncredit, professional education completion
New York University	N/A	Decentralized opportunities for noncredit, professional education badging include opportunities in Engineering and the School of Continuing Studies

¹ Environmental Scan conducted by UPCEA, September 2020, "An Update on Microcredentials and Digital Badges." Select institutions were highlighted because of their readily available and extensive programming and their diverse institutional backgrounds.

MOST COMMON BADGE AREAS AMONG INSTITUTIONS SURVEYED



BADGING CASE STUDY #1: EMERGING PROGRAM

UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

Enrollment: 12,000; 5k undergraduate, 7k postgraduates

Badges offered: 3

Badging Partner: [Credly](#)

Administration: Badging is centrally administered in the Office of the Registrar.

Framework: DU has three classifications for badges and can either be standalone or earned in conjunction with credit courses:

- Foundational
- Intermediate
- Advanced



Existing Badges:

- University of Denver University College Center for Professional Development:
 - » [Leader in Teaching Excellence](#)
 - » [Full Stack Coding Boot Camp](#)
- College of Business:
 - » [High Performance Leadership Program](#)
 - » [“Mini-MBA”](#) centered around leadership and business acumen workshops

Summary: The University of Denver has taken an introductory approach to badging. Faculty members can submit a micro-credential/badging proposal as the university looks to build out its badging portfolio.

BADGING CASE STUDY #2: ESTABLISHED PROGRAM

UNIVERSITY OF BUFFALO

Enrollment: 32,000; 22k undergraduate, 10k postgraduate

Badges offered: 89

Badging Partner: [Credly](#)

Administration: In 2017, UB established an [Office of Microcredentials](#) to manage its new badging program.

Framework: To create a framework that suits the profile of many potential student groups, UB created a badging program structured to meet one of 4 specific groups:

- Academic: For-credit programs that are stackable toward a degree
- Post-Traditional: Continuing education and professional development for non-degree seeking learners
- Enhancement: Co-curricular “value added” programs that provide recognition of informal learning while taking for-credit courses
- Emergent: Innovative programs that respond to the needs of the knowledge economy

Phase Rollout:

	Year 1: AY 2017/18	Year 2: AY 2018/19	Year 3: AY 2019/20
FALL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of Microcredentials established • Vision and goals set • Established faculty review committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot programs (11) launched • Plan codes in student information system • Data collection initiated • Issued first badges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSF funding for collaborative research • 12 new programs launched • Annual review process developed
SPRING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributed RFP for new microcredentials • Determined pilot programs • Program development • Purchased and configured badging platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 new programs launched • First microcredentials noted on academic transcripts • Set procedures for onboarding for microcredential coordinators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 new programs launched • Annual reviews started • New enrollment portal development
SUMMER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for registering/tracking students in student information system • Developed messaging for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acclaim migration • Revision process developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot data analysis • New enrollment portal testing • Strategic partnerships

Summary: UB is a badging leader in higher education because of its early adoption, well-developed strategy, institution-wide effort, dedicated centralized office to administer badging on behalf of the university, and phased roll-out since 2017.

BADGING CASE STUDY #3: ADVANCED PROGRAM

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Enrollment: 27k; 19k undergraduates, 8k graduates

Badges offered: 134

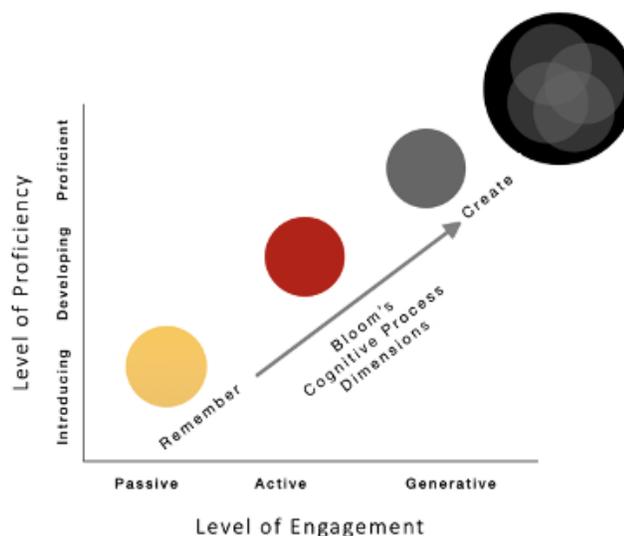
Badging Partner: [Credly](#)

Administration: The College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University administers and [issues digital badges](#) on behalf of campus.

Framework: NU's digital badges exist in four levels. These badges can be stacked:

- Level 1 badges: Increase knowledge around a specific topic
» Example: [Effective Crisis Communication](#)
- Level 2 badges: Hands-on practice applying new skills
» Example: [Exploring Python](#)
- Level 3 badges: High-value skills that enrolled students encounter in courses they complete toward their degree
» Example: [Human Resource Metrics](#)
- Level 4 badges: Curated bundles of specific courses and experiential learning activities that prepare learners to apply a skillset immediately. Available to Northeastern students enrolled in participating programs

- L1** Non-credit learning, lecture series, On Demand programming
- L2** Some workshops and shorter duration experiences
- L3** Course-aligned experiences
- L4** A bundling of specific L3 badges and experiential learning opportunities to create an *Experiential Micro-Certificate*.



Specific examples will vary by College and program.

Summary: Northeastern has an industry-leading, innovative badging program. Another early adopter of badging, Northeastern developed a [first-of-its-kind partnership with IBM](#), offering workplace digital badges for academic credit toward professional master's degree programs. In addition to utilizing an industry partner for badging, badges at Northeastern are stackable, attainable, and either co-curricular or standalone for maximum flexibility and student choice.



DIGITAL BADGES AT UNC-CHAPEL HILL

UNC-Chapel Hill Digital and Lifelong Learning is piloting digital badges as a way to demonstrate lifelong learning. We provide a central campus resource for badge strategy, design, and delivery. UNC-Chapel Hill units that are interested in issuing digital badges should [email Tyler Ritter](#), Director of Digital Learning Design & Development.



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