Tee Up the Skills

Learnings from one year of micro-credentialing with institutions, learners and employers

July 2019

Education Design Lab
Introduction

How might employers and educators come together to translate learning into workforce skills?

We talk about the promise of digital micro-credentialing to address the skills gap with discrete, portable, machine-readable evidence of learning. While an estimated one in five colleges already offers digital badges, these offerings tend to be a one-way street—build the badges, see what happens. And, we have little evidence so far whether micro-credentials can be a market signal for hiring. We need a better understanding about how different types of learners value and utilize the micro-credentials they earn as part of their job search. We know even less about how hiring managers value and utilize digital micro-credentials to inform their hiring decisions. We believe that the development of these credentials would provide much needed visibility into the skills and abilities of learners, particularly the majority who graduate from less selective colleges. If education is going to invest in digital micro-credentials, we must be able to articulate their utility. This requires a partnership between the supply side of credentials and the demand side.

In the Fall of 2018, the Education Design Lab (Lab), launched Tee Up the Skills with seven two- and four-year colleges and universities across the U.S. The year-long pilot paired each school with at least one employer partner to understand how the Lab’s 21st Century Skills Digital Badges could improve students’ career readiness and serve as valuable signals for entry-level hiring. Employers recommended which of the Lab’s eight 21st Century Skills Badges should be earned by learners for their hot entry-level roles.

The Employer Perspective

Enthusiasm is Surging

The Lab and our institutional partners were bullish about Tee Up the Skills, but we needed to know, “Would hiring managers care about these micro-credentials?” After several months of on-the-ground work, there is reason to believe the Lab’s Badges could effectively address several of employers’ most pressing pain points with respect to hiring recent college graduates: identifying candidates who (a) have the right combination of skills to hit the ground running on day one, (b) are a better fit for their organizational culture and are therefore more likely to be retained, and (c) are positioned for growth beyond the entry-level.

Employers Are Interested In Digital Credentials

- 60% employers want to learn more
- 33% employers see micro-credentials potentially being as valuable as other credentials
- 7% don’t carry that much weight

Employers Aren’t Seeing the Skills They Need

- 17% Only 17% of employers are pleased with the 21st Century Skills (non-technical skills) of college graduates.
- 78% 22% 78% of employers are very interested in new ways to assess the skills of recent college graduates, while 22% indicated that they are somewhat interested in new methods of skill assessment. Out of all employers surveyed, none indicated that they have no interest.

Survey of employer participants in the 2018-2019 Tee Up the Skills cohort. 18 representatives from 13 employers.
Confidence is High

In-person design sessions, surveys and follow-up interviews show employers are encouraged by the rigorous learning experience students are required to complete to earn the Badges. The intentional practice of 21st century skills that extends beyond the classroom and their application in workplace scenarios is something they rarely see from college graduates. Employers gravitated towards our performance-based assessments (called “Proving Grounds”) and imagined seeing candidates who’ve successfully completed these to earn the badge. They are confident that learners who earn 21st Century Skills Badges can stand out in a sea of applicants.

Search for New Hiring Tools is Palpable

As employers shift towards skills-based hiring and cull candidates by search terms, the typical resume qualifications that college graduates believe employers want to see are becoming less important (e.g., number of activities, grade point average). What you’ve majored in and where you earned your degree is not the currency it once was. Employers need different data and are deconstructing resumes in a more targeted search for the skills and competencies you have acquired through what you’ve done. They are willing to look at new and potentially critical thinking, collaboration, oral communication, initiative, creative problem solving, resilience, empathy, and intercultural fluency.

Most Popular Badge Requests from Employer Partners

Amongst the questions we sought to answer through Tee Up the Skills, we wanted to better understand which 21st century skills are most critical to employers as they seek new employees. During design sessions, we asked a total of 18 representatives from 13 employers to choose the top three Badges they would like candidates to earn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Communication</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Problem Solving</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Fluency</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Hiring can get complicated. By using these digital badges, hiring managers will easily be able to identify and separate students with the right skills from other applicants.”

Joanna Morrison, SHRM-SCP
Director of Talent Acquisition, Northern Light Health
The Arc of the Work

In constructing Tee Up the Skills, we sought to answer key questions about digital micro-credentials. We wanted to issue a clear call to action—a movement(#TeeUpTheSkills) to inspire educators and employers broadly to collaborate in an effort to equip students with the skills to meet employers’ needs for the futureofwork.

To that end, during the Fall 2018 semester, we led participating employers and institutions (including learners) through a series of interactive design sessions to:

1. **Educate employers** about the Lab’s Badges
2. **Identify which Badges** would be offered at each institution
3. **Aid in the design of each institution’s pilot**—namely, how each would integrate and offer the Lab’s Badges to learners

Over the past three years, the Lab has engaged the administrators and faculty of 12 institutions, 300+ students and 50+ employers in the co-design of meaningful micro-credentials that transform the way learners recognize and activate their skills. Each of the Badges is made up of four core sub-competencies, Performance-based assessments associated with each of the sub-competencies must be completed for a learner to earn the Badge.

Six colleges successfully launched pilots during the Spring 2019 semester. The seventh, Langston University, in spite of their enthusiasm and engaged Fortune 500 employer partner, was unable to launch a live student pilot in this academic year. It is important to note that none of these institutions had previous experience offering digital micro-credentials. Within a matter of months, they were able to design and stand up programs, market the offering to their learners and facilitate the learning experience.

Their keys to success:

1. **Assemble** an enthusiastic and gritty team
2. **Leverage** existing assets and programs
3. **Secure support** for the work at the Provost level
## The Pilots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Institution</th>
<th>The Badge(s)</th>
<th>The Pilot Models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 San Jose State University</td>
<td></td>
<td>Embedded into College of Business courses; Leadership certificate offered by Student Involvement Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 Central New Mexico Community College</td>
<td></td>
<td>Embedded into the Applied Technology program as required assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 Alamo Colleges District (Northwest Vista and Northeast Lakeview Colleges)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Offered as an optional add-on to Economics and Fine Arts courses at each college campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 University at Albany, State University of New York</td>
<td></td>
<td>Offered to Accounting students in the Business program through Career Path Mobile, an app for both learners and institutions that tracks learners’ program milestones and encourages engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 University of Maine</td>
<td></td>
<td>Offered as part of ongoing Career Services Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 American Public University System</td>
<td></td>
<td>Offered as a free workshop housed within their Learning Management System (Sakai) for students in the IT department</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special thanks to Credly, a leading badging platform that provided pro-bono accounts for many of the institutions’ pilots.

### Institutions

1. San Jose State University
2. Central New Mexico Community College
3. Alamo Colleges District
4. American Public University System
5. University at Albany-State, University of New York
6. University of Maine

### Employers

1. H.E.B.
2. Accenture
3. FDM Group
4. TLC Plumbing
5. Jaynes Corporation
6. Ernst & Young
7. Enterprise
8. Cisco Systems
9. Bangor Savings Bank
10. Northern Light Health

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Tee Up the Skills Touching Cities Across the United States

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Tee Up the Skills
The Learner Perspective

By the end of the 2019 spring semester, nearly 100 learners earned Badges across the six pilots. About 150 learners started the earning process and did not complete it by the end of the semester. (Two pilots are still running.) For learners who did earn Badges, common themes and experiences from the earning process became clear.

A huge part of having a (21st Century Skills) Badge is that you can display different skills that you wouldn’t necessarily put on your resume. Showing that I have skills like collaboration or oral communication seems like such a simple thing, but not everyone actually has them. This sets me apart from other applicants.

Mari Smith
Student, University of Maine

Showcasing Earned Micro-Credentials

Micro-credentials fit with traditional ways of showcasing learning and work experience such as the resume and on professional platforms like LinkedIn. Learners from the cohort included their earned Badges on their resumes by providing both the Badge icon and details (both on the page and linked externally) as to the rigor they exhibited to earn the Badge.

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Areas of Expertise
- Equipment Installation
- Outstanding Customer Service
- Welding & Fabrication
- Safety & Compliance

Education & Training
- Associate of Applied Science in Electromechanical Technology | Central New Mexico CC
- Green HVAC/R Certified

Professional Experience
HVAC/R Technician
Dagmoor, Inc., Boise, Idaho - 5/2010 to Present
Serve as senior technician leading installation and maintenance of air conditioning, heating, ventilation, steam distribution, and refrigeration equipment in commercial facilities.
- Install compressors, evaporators, motors, ducts, and piping as well as mechanical/electrical controls; read and interpret blueprints/diagrams.
- Conduct preventive and corrective maintenance on bearings, pumps, polyphase motors, shaft alignments and fans; document all maintenance/repair actions and manage equipment records.
- Troubleshoot breakdowns and repair malfunctioning HVAC systems and components; utilize measuring and testing instruments.
- Delivered outstanding customer service as main point of contact for project inquiries; achieved 100% quality service rating in random client surveys.
- Routinely worked overtime, weekends, and holidays to ensure complete customer satisfaction.

HVAC/R Service Technician
Installed, repaired, and maintained rooftop units, split systems, central plants, VAV boxes, boilers, controls, pneumatics, and other mechanical equipment.

What Learners Say About Earning Badges

- they can activate the skill in a workplace scenario
- they feel more comfortable with critical feedback
- they feel more knowledgeable about the skill than peers who didn’t earn a Badge
- they can excel without much supervision

Casey Porter
Talent Acquisition Manager, Enterprise

At Enterprise, we like to see a candidate balance academics with such soft skills as work ethic, communication and teamwork. These mobility micro-credentials provide students an opportunity to build on and articulate these skills.
The Virtual Career Fair

In April 2019, we hosted a 21st Century Skills Virtual Career Fair for employers and learners across the Tee Up cohort. Hosted with generous support from vFairs, a worldwide leader in virtual events, this exclusive opportunity allowed learners who were in the process of earning or had earned Badges to connect with and be discovered by employers specifically interested in these micro-credentials and their associated skills. Nearly 40 learners and six employers joined together virtually and asynchronously. An experience that was new to most participants, this small test demonstrated the promise of virtual career fairs as a tool to propel learners who have earned micro-credentials.

The partners knew that, for this first round, we might not have “direct hits” where one of the employers would find a candidate who had earned a Badge to hire. We are still gathering this data, but recognize that a bigger pilot cohort with targeted majors will likely yield more data. Employers responded very favorably to the learners they interviewed who had earned Badges—it is clear that they want to hire learners who have earned micro-credentials. Several employers asked to continue as pilot participants next year.

Huge thanks to @HEB and @AccentureFed for interviewing @govista students who earned #digitalbadges as part of @AlamoColleges1 participation in the #TeeUpTheSkills pilot #employerpartners #21stcenturyskills #marketableskills #oralcommunication #initiative

@LukeDowden
Chief Online Learning Officer and Associate Vice Chancellor, Alamo Colleges District

In April 2019, the Lab hosted a 21st Century Skills Virtual Career Fair for employers and learners across the Tee Up cohort. Participants were able to explore the Virtual Fair as they would one in-person—moving between booths of employers and being able to connect with other participants.
The T

The hunger for new ways to measure the readiness of college graduates in their applicant pools made luring employers to the table to participate in Tee Up The Skills relatively easy. Armed with text-heavy job descriptions for one or more of their hard-to-fill positions, they engaged in a skills mapping exercise to extract and visualize the most important 21st century and technical skills for those jobs. Called a T-profile, based on the concept of the T-shaped learner, this simple yet powerful tool became the calling card for Tee Up The Skills and a mechanism around which employers, educators and learners could finally unite.

The T-profile produced a treasure trove of data and insights on existing gaps between employers, institutional learning providers and learners.

1. Employers recognized they were not explicit enough in their job descriptions; they often lacked mention of the 21st century skills that employers craved

2. Educators, particularly those not often in contact with employers, gained a better understanding of the value of aligning what they are teaching with workforce needs

3. Learners were able to see, at a glance, precisely what employers wanted

We intended the T-profile to be a tool to help us identify which of the Lab’s Badges colleges might offer. The T could very well stand for ‘transparency.’ Meaning “readily understood, easily detected, obvious,” transparency, especially as it relates to 21st century skills, is a missing variable in what is becoming an increasingly nuanced matching process between prospective employee and hiring manager. Employers should clearly articulate the 21st century (and technical) skills they need for individual roles, as they did in filling out the T-profile, so that both prospective employees (in this case college students) are aware of the skills they need and education providers can create more opportunities for learners to intentionally acquire the skills needed. It is a collective effort, but it starts with employers. It is an investment of time we believe can be instrumental in solving the skills gap.
The Lessons Learned

For the six institutions and their employer partners who successfully embarked on testing the delivery of the Lab’s Badges, clear learnings emerged on how to set up a program, based on analysis of completion rates and employer engagement.

What Works

Sharing the facilitator role:
It helps to spread the work needed to successfully facilitate the micro-credentialing process and assess learners seeking to earn a Badge

Exposing employers to micro-credentials:
Allowing employers to experience parts of the Badge earning process or allowing them to help determine which Badges the institution will prioritize

Embedding micro-credentials into for-credit courses:
Learners are more likely to engage in a micro-credentialing program when the assignments and assessments are weaved into coursework that they must take; but, if they are awarded automatically, learners might not know to claim them or be fluent in their new badge competencies

Include both the micro-credential details and its icon on a resume:
Including the credential graphic signals immediately to hiring managers that an applicant has and is developing that skill set up-front

Micro-credentials need to be interactive and visual:
Interactive learner modules that make up the earning process should utilize visuals over plain text, so that students feel that it is differentiated from their regular coursework

What Needs Work

Allowing for a single modality (video) for proving ground submissions:
Some learners may not have access to a web camera or may perform better off video

Offering a Badge as "extra credit":
(1) Offering micro-credentials as a non-credit co-curricular activity can devalue the importance of the credential, particularly if learners haven’t been in the job market to understand the targeted needs of employers and (2) learners want to receive the equivalent course credit for the work they input to earn a micro-credential

Expecting learning providers to facilitate the micro-credential earning process with little-to-no prior training:
Learning providers should consider giving time to facilitators prior to understand best practices (the Lab is developing a Professional Development Badge)

Referring to micro-credentialing programs as "Badging Programs":
Words matter to learners—learners are more inclined to participate in a "micro-credentialing program" as opposed to a "badging program"

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Building a relationship with a single HR representative:
In order to create an embedded practice and understanding of micro-credentials within a company, learning providers should build relationships with an employer beyond a single HR representative; one HR representative doesn’t always speak for the employer

Lack of alignment between completion of micro-credentials and employer recruitment cycles:
Institutions and learning providers should consider processes that allow them to time the micro-credential earning process of their learners with employer hiring cycles
Tee Up the Skills has taken my team’s knowledge of digital badges from theory to pilot in less than a year. Northwest Vista College and Northeast Lakeview College have been key partners in building academic rigor into each piloted badge, thus elevating the badges from their toolkit state to a premier learning experience that can be assessed and credentialed.

Jen Beth-Ball
Chief Online Learning Officer and Associate Vice Chancellor, Alamo Colleges District

The Next Step: Tee Up the Skills to BadgedToHire

While many of the Badges are currently available in a ready-to-launch format for colleges via Canvas Network, we aim to have version 2.0 of the Badges available via a platform with built-in tracking, assessment and capabilities by the end of this year.

Over the next two years, we will build upon initial pilots and lessons learned at three colleges: University of Maine, San Jose State University and Central New Mexico Community College. With funding from Lumina Foundation, this work will sync-up with local- and state-level efforts to explore the promise of digital credentials as we attempt to build-up proof points and best practices for how micro-credentialing programs can gain traction with employers, and serve all populations—even level the playing field for learners who may have fewer advantages and networks, but well-articulated 21st century skills.