Meeting Summary

Integrating Industry Certifications into Four-Year Degree Programs
Health Care Convening

April 23-24, 2019

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND CONVENING OBJECTIVES

Workcred, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU), and the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) have joined forces under a Lumina Foundation grant to explore how students can earn both degrees and certifications as part of their four-year degree program. Closer coordination among certification bodies and universities is needed to identify and scale practical opportunities.

A series of convenings between certification bodies and universities are being planned with the goal of identifying the barriers that would impede such partnerships and developing ways to overcome them. Each convening will address a different industry sector or topic, incorporating opportunities to embed certifications for cross-cutting skills, such as project management and data analytics, within degrees related to the sector. The ultimate output of the convenings will be a framework laying the groundwork for potential pilot programs to test different strategies and practices to better align certifications and degrees. This document summarizes the first of these convenings, focused on health care.

To provide a level-setting foundation for the discussions, the project team reviewed definitions of different types of credentials at the outset of the meeting, and highlighted the key themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with participants prior to the convening:

Certification Bodies

- Many certification body representatives reported that they are not at all or not very familiar with the process of curriculum development at universities.

- Certification body representatives expressed their interest in building relationships and partnerships with universities, but most admitted that they do not know where to begin.

- Some challenges to closer partnerships between certification bodies and universities include certification prerequisites for experience and getting adequate student buy-in.

- Certification bodies want to gain a better understanding of potential issues and barriers as seen by universities.

- To successfully embed a certification program into a degree program, both the certification body and the universities need to allocate resources and staff time to maintain the program and the partnership.

- University representatives also revealed that they were unsure of how to get started/connect with certification bodies.

- There is a general lack of understanding of how the certification exams are developed.

- University representatives expressed a desire to embed certifications into degree programs to lessen the burden of financial constraints on students (i.e., financial aid will not cover cost of certifications outside degree programs), and introducing certifications to career planning conversations earlier in a student's academic journey.

- University representatives would like to see better and increased communication between universities and certification bodies.

- A better understanding of how these potential partnerships can affect return on investment (ROI) for institutions is needed.

KEY OUTCOMES

Based on the input from the convening participants, the project team will develop and share:

1. A matrix with information about certification bodies and relevant certifications
2. A guidance document that will help universities better understand how to determine a quality certification
3. A university point of contact for certification bodies to discuss partnership opportunities

PARTNERSHIP EXAMPLES – DAY ONE AND DAY TWO

Four participants shared information, examples, and related challenges around their current partnerships for group consideration:

1. **Natalya Mytareva, executive director at Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI)**, explained that CCHI offers two certifications for medical interpreters: the Core Certification Healthcare Interpreter (CoreCHI™), which tests medical interpreters of any language on the core professional knowledge and skills needed to perform interpreter's duties in any healthcare setting, and the Certified Healthcare Interpreter (CHI™), which is a language-specific performance certification for Spanish, Arabic, and Mandarin interpreting in healthcare. Natalya provided examples of some of their successful partnerships with higher education institutions:

   a. University of Texas – Austin has had an interpretation and translation department for many years, but recently determined that they had a need for medical interpreting. Language faculty reached out to CCHI to align curriculum of the new degree program in medical translation to the CoreCHI certification exam. One challenge CCHI uncovered is that aspects of health care safety was missing from the interpreting curriculum, so the partnership was helpful in resolving the issue.

   b. Kent State University translation faculty invite CCHI to speak to students to expose them of other career paths available in the field.

c. Evergreen Valley College (San Jose, CA) and Metropolitan Community College (Kansas City, KS) both offer a medical interpreter certificate program in Spanish in which local foundations pay for students to enroll in the program and the certificate exam must be taken to finish the program.

Natalya summarized that although these partnerships are relatively new, they have seen more students pass the certification exam.

2. **Benjamin Amick, professor and chair of the department of health policy and management at Florida International University (FIU)**, revealed that FIU is currently examining various options for partnerships at different levels within the university. However, they are still grappling with many challenges, one of which is the fact that employers are requiring five years of work experience and a certification, so the university is looking at redesigning the master's program in the Department of Health Policy and Management to provide training that would prepare students for the certification exam. Benjamin reported that there is a lot of synergy within different parts of the university to pursue partnerships with certification bodies, including for certified health care quality and certified risk managers, which has not been done before.

3. **Ashley Forsyth, academic programs specialist at Project Management Institute (PMI)**, shared information about how they work with higher education institutions to grow the profession of project management. According to Ashley, PMI:

   a. Maintains a website (pmiteach.org) that is dedicated to project management faculty to provide reading lists, outlines of topical areas, examples of assessments and outcomes, and project management curriculum. It also offers a place for faculty to share best practices and other information with each other. In addition, PMI published two case studies, *Syracuse University: Meeting Employer's Needs Through Project Management Education,* and *Boston University: Addressing Global Demands Help School Expand,* that showcase how project management is being incorporated in academic programs. [To sit for the Project Management Professional (PMP)® certification, individuals must met significant experience requirements. To address the experience requirement, PMI developed the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM)®. Students interested in the CAPM must complete 23 hours of project management education before takes the certification exam.]

   b. Offers group discounted student memberships.

   c. Engages scholars, practitioners, and project management professionals through PMI Academic Resources, which provides funding for new research, opportunities for publication, and presentation of research findings at educational events around the globe.

   d. Runs the Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs (GAC) to confirm that an institution's program has been carefully assessed and that its scale, scope, and quality meet comprehensive, global standards for accreditation.

One challenge that PMI is currently working to overcome is how best to relay exam results for students of integrated certification and degree programs. Currently, once a student takes the certification exam, even if part of a degree program, the student must bring a paper copy of the results to the institution, as PMI is not able share the information due to privacy regulations. Ashley revealed that PMI is exploring ways to move to proctor-based testing where faculty will be able to administer the exam themselves via computers and have access to the results that way.

4. **Michael Huffman, director of the office of continuing and professional education at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)**, offered insights into the challenges VCU is currently facing that may hinder the development of partnerships with certification bodies. Making changes to current degree programs at VCU is a slow process due to the approval regulations of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. Balancing those regulations with market demand has been a bit of a hindrance for VCU up to this point.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND REPORT-OUTS – DAY ONE AND DAY TWO

Participants on day one worked in small groups to discuss facilitated questions. The groups' input to each question is listed below:

1. *Regardless of whether you already have or are considering partnerships, what data and information do you need to determine fit in order to integrate certifications with four-year degree programs?*

   - Labor trends linked to certification data
   - Knowing which certifications are available/exist now
   - Long-term employability and job growth data
   - How a certification maps to a related curriculum
   - Student demand and program retention
   - Additional cost of certification
   - Testing, training, and prerequisite requirements
   - Data on what institutions have successful integrated programs, and their contacts
   - ROI data
   - Information about who is setting the standard or accrediting the program

2. *What are the different types of models that could be developed to better align or integrate certifications with four-year degree programs?*

   A three-sided model was proposed that would connect employers, certification bodies, and universities. The group noted that the certification exam should not be the main outcome and a "teach to the test" mentality should be avoided. It was also noted that there are competing goals in higher education, and that colleges and universities are not always focused on career preparation for their students. Consideration would need to be given to make sure that

changes to curriculum could keep pace with, and not lag behind, changes in job market demands.

3. *What are the strengths and assets of universities and certification bodies that can help community college students who earn a certification transfer to a four-year degree program? What are the barriers?*

    - *Strengths include:*
        - Flexibility to come up with creative pathways (e.g., special topics course that eventually becomes a full course, track, major)
    - *Barriers include:*
        - Program development can be slow
        - Lack of communication
        - In general, neither universities nor certification bodies have a solid understanding of the others' curriculum/certification development process
        - It can be hard to keep up with the changing health care field
    - *Other Takeaways*
        - Establish relationships with schools by sending volunteer board members to the local community colleges

4. *How do certification bodies determine their prerequisites for their certifications? How can university programs be aligned with prerequisites? What types of new opportunities could be created for four-year degree students?*

    As a first step, institutions need to be informed that certifications exist and that they have value. More and better communication between institutions and certification bodies is needed. Participants also suggested providing a list of what data-driven method was used to develop the exam to share with institutions.

    Just as universities have approval levels, so do certification bodies. It was noted that certification bodies looking to make changes to prerequisites may meet resistance from the stakeholders who advise them.

    There is a need for more broad certifications in health care to facilitate entry into health professions, enabling students with associate degrees to transition easier to baccalaureate degrees. Unless a certification is directly related to the course credits and the baccalaureate degree, is not eligible for Title IV funds.

5. *What is the return on investment (ROI) of time and financial resources to universities and certification bodies to enter into these types of partnerships?*

    According to the group, the ROI needs to focus on the needs of the student, and the argument was made that there should be one cost for all students. It was also noted that with certifications, students know what they are getting, and often at a lower cost.

6. *What types of resources would universities and certification bodies need to provide to start and sustain these partnerships?*

- A champion at the institution, ideally the president or provost, to preach the vision and facilitate discussions with faculty
- A central office to act as a knowledge center for the programs/partnerships
- Policies that will preside over the process for equating competencies of a certification to equivalent college credits
- Faculty buy-in, especially in the development of the policies
- Access to labor market data and resources to interpret and leverage this data in a meaningful way
- For certification bodies, buy-in from universities to integrate programmatic accreditation
- Joint conversations with industry to help shape partnerships
- A national portal to connect institutions with certification bodies

7. *How do I determine who to work with within a university or certification body? Who is the decision maker?*

As different universities have different structures, it was suggested that the role of "director for critical learning" or "central knowledge officer" be created. For certification bodies, the "certification director" or newly created "director of university partnerships" were suggested as appropriate points of contact. Employers and trade associations should play an important role too, mentoring and providing a support pipeline.

Other Comments

Certifications should be used to help students obtain experience required for some health professions. Sometimes certifications are not valued by educators unless they result in a living wage for the certification holder. Accreditation and licensure boards are often barriers. Corporations tell us that they value certifications but then they may hire people with no certifications. This may be because they do not have to pay as high a wage for a non-certified worker.

All education programs should facilitate lifelong learning.

Participants on day two worked in small groups to discuss facilitated questions. The groups' input to each question is listed below:

1. *What are the benefits for students to earn certifications in areas outside of health care-related four-year degree programs?*

A certification acknowledges additional content expertise. It provides increased marketability, versatility, experience, and facilitates lifelong learning. Significantly, earning these types of certifications can prepare students for a wider array of jobs.

2. *From the perspective of certification bodies, what opportunities do you see to align/embed your certification with health care-related degree programs? What opportunities do you see to increase the value of the credential and the degree by creating stronger pathways?*

There should be strategic conversations to determine which certifications are in greatest demand and which tracks would benefit students most. Creative solutions need to be worked out so certifications outside of health care would not increase the time it takes to earn the degree. Courses should be offered to support students in achieving the competencies needed to take the certification exam. Finally, partnerships should seek to create an ecosystem of support.

3. *How do you build buy-in with both universities and certification bodies to create, implement, and sustain these partnerships?*

In this discussion, participants suggested to:
- Gain buy-in from senior leadership at universities, starting with presidents and provosts
- Focus on the value to students. Bringing benefits to students will increase buy-in
- Use a pragmatic, multi-pronged approach involving all stakeholders, but be strategic
- Find grants to build momentum and fund staff on both sides to see why it is important
- Find opportunities to share student success stories to demonstrate the proof of concept and ROI

4. *What is the ROI of time and financial resources to universities and certification bodies to enter into these types of partnerships?*

According to the participants, the ROI of these types of partnerships include:
- Better communication
- Greater cost-efficiency for the student
- Improved student outcomes that translates to greater efficiency on the job
- Reduced risk

MODELING EXERCISE

Working in the same small groups, participants from day one discussed and developed various models of partnerships between universities and certification bodies specific to health care.

- ALL STAKEHOLDER MODEL
  - Work with local industries, the K-12 system, career counselors/advisors, and all other related stakeholders in determining the core competencies that expand to all health care occupations
  - Involves multiple certification levels for meeting all needs:
    i. Develop a certification program with a community college for those who want to stop with a two-year degree, or no degree at all
    ii. Develop a next level certification program for students who wish to pursue a bachelor's degree
    iii. Potential for a higher level certification for mater's level students or people seeking advanced skills

- PRE-HEALTH CARE DEGREE PROGRAM MODEL
  - Provides multiple entries/tracks into health care during the first two years of the program
    i. Allied tech component with numerous course choices (at least one required), each attached to a related certification
    ii. Provides student with opportunity to work in the industry and gain experience
    iii. Could culminate with an associate's degree, or go into four-year degree or higher
    iv. This is a trans-disciplinary approach that gives language majors another option (e.g., students studying Spanish and health care)

- HEALTH SCIENCE DATA ANALYTICS PROGRAM MODEL
  - Engage key stakeholders from the beginning
    i. Higher education leadership
    ii. Certification bodies
    iii. Industry
    iv. Accreditation bodies
    v. Potentially community colleges
  - Gather data for the program
    i. Labor market analysis/survey local landscape
    ii. Evaluate existing curriculum to involve/adapt
    iii. State/local regulations that may impact
    iv. Funding to support
  - Develop implementation strategy
  - Pilot, adapt as needed

- BIOLOGY DEGREE WITH CERTIFICATION MODEL
    - Electronic health record certification
        i. First, need to evaluate the biology curriculum to identify best areas to connect the certification, what are the gaps
        ii. Involve stakeholders
            - American Medical Association, American Hospital Association
            - Advising center/career center on campus
            - Mechanism for certification bodies to connect with employers to make sure there is alignment
        iii. Map out best time to take courses aligned to certification and sit for exam within degree path
    - ROI: employers should have less onboarding and training, fewer inefficiencies, and students gain more purposeful and meaningful careers that might not otherwise be aware of/pursued

- ADAPTING A TWO-YEAR PROGRAM INTO A FOUR-YEAR PROGRAM MODEL
    - The first two years of the expanded program can be general requirements, focusing the last two years on specific courses
        i. One year of didactic work (e.g., radiation stenography)
        ii. One year of clinical work (counts toward both certification and degree requirements)
        iii. Completion will have two parts – exam to determine eligibility and student uses exam for final for physics course
    - Considerations: would students want the four-year program? Both sides need to make concessions in order for it to work

- LIFELONG LEARNING MODEL
    - Relationship between what certification bodies and higher education should be – every step, they need to talk and collaborate
        i. Terminal credentials
            - Need to develop/determine standard, KSAs needed
            - Involve higher education representatives when creating the certification/exam
            - Recertification should be involved by both sides
        ii. Stackable credentials
            - 25% of a program completed can result in a credential
            - 60% completion results in another credential, and so on
            - Involves credit for prior learning component

- Also involves a recertification element for credit (dual purpose)
- LIFELONG TRANSCRIPT MODEL
  - Help produce more content that all credentialing bodies can understand: E-based portfolios that will allow students to demonstrate all of their earned credentials to prospective employers
    i. Scalable, sustainable, and reliable
    ii. Collection of knowledge
    iii. Leverage opportunities for open education to translate into badges, that could translate into other credentials
    iv. Student ownership – Students will have control to access their earned credentials through an e-based model platform
  - Considerations: residency components
    i. Would not be free, need new FAFSA regulations to help
    ii. Virtual reality may start to play a role

CROSS-CUTTING PARTNERSHIPS

Working in small groups, participants from day two discussed how higher education could facilitate a one-stop shop for certification bodies to work across programs and what would success look like for cross-cutting certification partnerships? Key themes and recommendations that emerged include:

- Establish a director of certification or similar role within institutions
- Create central liaison office/institute to connect with certification bodies on campus to leverage a national network of open access of frameworks and maps to draw from
  - Maintain a portal of best point of contact/champions among faculty and certification bodies and comprehensive information about the programs (i.e., certification exam competencies, institution curriculum components)
- Restructure general education curriculum to create a common understanding of what was learned
  - Provides the flexibility to move between disciplines easier and the ability to develop a general education certification around a concrete set of skills
  - Could also develop a 4+1 program if the cross-cutting certification is really important, but doesn't fit easily in the 4-year degree program
- Elevate discussions to senior leaders and secure institution-wide commitment
- Jointly highlight program details and case studies (e.g., completion rate, employability, etc.) in national meetings
- Bring in advisors/career counselors to help discuss all available options and gain student buy-in
- Align partnerships to strategic goals of both sides and accreditation body requirements

TAKEAWAYS AND REFLECTIONS

Based on the discussions, participants provided key questions, takeaways, lessons learned, and action steps that will be considered in advancing the project.

Participant Reflections – Day One

Questions

- What certifications exist and how I do determine whether a certification is of quality/value to employers?
- How can we integrate other stakeholders?
- How do you accomplish the goals without adding time to the degree?
- How can campus majors build in a practical/pre-employment course into major curricula?
- What are the effective practices of new models at four-year institutions?
- What promising practices exist for forming communication channels between four-year institutions and certification bodies?
- What are the legal implications for colleges and universities as the models discussed may not be feasible until regulations are changed?
- What is the role of government in this issue?

Takeaways

- Universities need a culture shift.
- I am unaware of all the credentials available and how to determine their value/quality.
- Stakeholders need to better communicate and establish standard course requirements.
- Better communication and collaboration between universities and certifications bodies is needed.
- Learned more about certification and licensing bodies.
- There is a tremendous potential to help students!
- Open-mindedness is KEY!
- Everyone has to be willing to concede to something!
- Certification eligibility requirements should be revisited regularly.
- Certifications are not simply final exams but serve a specific important role.

Participant Reflections – Day Two

Universities desire a map/matrix with info about certification bodies, the quality/value of their certifications, and how to map to curricula

- We need a list of certifications and what they provide. We need data that shows the benefit to students of the certifications. Step: I will start presenting the ideas presented here to colleagues.
- Detailed information on certifications and certifying organizations to get a better big picture understanding of the utility for the university (e.g., inventory/database, length of time in operation, how to distinguish among certifying agents).
- I need a map to know what certifications exist and where an initial alignment to CIP Codes are. From there, I can take the starting point to connect to a SOC.

> CIP → SOC
>
> Certification → SOC
>
> CIP ←→ certifications

- Better overall landscapes of all certification bodies (e.g., matrix of certification bodies/requirements/current clients/4-year institution partners/details of certification.
- What do we need? Information and hub – access to all certifications with a matrix of requirements. More questions than answers – FAQs section on hub.
- Access to materials to evaluate quality of certification bodies.
- Need more info/awareness of what certifying organizations exist and what certifications are available. Would love the opportunity for a follow-up meeting.
- Understanding existing certifications and how competencies align with curricula.
- What we need: a comprehensive list of available certifications, including summary of jobs that align with these certifications.
- List of ICE-approved certification bodies with a descriptive narrative (concise) of its value, what it entails (i.e., education, work experience, etc.), and how a student (person) would benefit from a particular certification.

Certification bodies also have an appetite for information from and about universities

- *(Need) from Workcred and APLU*: The schools that are open to incorporating a course or aligning to a certification. *(Need) from schools*: A roadmap with timelines on what we certification bodies can provide to get momentum going.

Examples that showcase success can serve as a blueprint

- A list of examples or case studies of universities or certification units partnering. Include data and best practices to support success.
- A blueprint to start the process, and the conversations at the university leadership level.
- Multiple examples that showcase a variety of disciplines and cross-cutting certifications. A list of possible certifications that have resulted in employment for students (undergrad).
- What I need: A model public health program that has built certifications into the program and has been accredited.

Still, _how_ do we go about forming a partnership?

- How do we form a great team or partnership to solve the KEY problem (certification into four-year degree program)?

Advice on what is needed to take this to the next level

- What do we need to get to the next level?
    - Map connections between staple disciplines at universities and associated certification bodies.
    - Longer term: Launch pilot leading to national initiation to establish certification officers on each campus.
- What is needed to take theory to practice:
    - Continue discussions at UPCEA level/conferences to introduce best practices and report on success stories.
    - Fund a pilot program or initiative that integrates goals of certification and university degrees.
    - Create some sort of communications channel/portal to facilitate discussions and networks.
- We need to take baby steps, such as: first we should work with degree programs directly related to certification and then branch out to unrelated degrees. We need to first identify schools that offer a degree in our field.

Focus on the student

- Takeaway: We need to rethink partnership for student success.

Buy-in from senior leaders is key

- Elevate the discussion to senior leaders (presidents and provosts) to ensure this becomes a broader topic of discussion on campuses.
- University participants mentioned that faculty buy-in is equally important, as is support from department chairs.

National exposure can help build support for the movement

- Next step: Find ways to bring this up and keep bringing it up at the national level. It has to be "trending" in a way. In other words, perpetual support for these ideas at many different angles will bring more people to the table, and more ideas and energy will emerge.
- Bring these discussions to national association meetings.
- Consider developing an op-ed that provides an overview of this pilot project

Other

- Need to connect healthcare more to the study of analytics.

- Certifications in cross-cutting skills may be a more productive approach for the health care industry
- Takeaway: Ideas that I'd like to share with campus leadership about the integration of certification in undergraduate programs.
- Include employers on the university advisory boards into these conversations
- Utilize employers as an integrative tool versus just a recruitment tool (Employers usually come to campuses twice a year, fall and spring, to recruit students who are graduating)