Themes from Interviews with Universities

Background and Knowledge

- How do certification bodies set minimum qualifications for exams?

- Restriction to students at the graduate vs. undergraduate levels

- Degree inflation--what role does this play in the world of credentialing bodies?

- Who authorizes the certification/credentialing bodies?

- Defining: accreditation, certification, credentialing bodies (i.e., certain states do not recognize or adhere to the terminology)

    - **Example**: VCU indicated that the lexicon of a certificate vs certificate of completion for non-degree programs is confusing and can be a barrier for state regulatory issues (CHEV - Council of Higher Education in Virginia)

- How does it all work and how can it be infused into the university eco-system?

- High need for roadmaps to increase awareness, understanding, and knowledge

    - Lead into internal buy-in

    - Leadership support and advocacy

- Role of Faculty: Adjunct/Part-Time vs. Full-Time/Tenured Track

    - Some may be better positioned to help with the alignment due to their integration in the field (i.e., part-time/adjunct)

    - **Example**: Florida International University shared that in the School of Public Health, adjuncts (many of whom have earned certifications themselves) help develop courses that align curriculum with certification

Students

- Career advising and its alignment to certifications

- Embed certifications into degree programs to lessen burden of financial constraints (i.e., financial aid will not cover certifications outside the degree programs)

- Introducing certifications to career planning conversations early-on in the student's academic journey

- More intentionality behind embedding certifications into certain programs (i.e., liberal arts, arts & sciences majors) rather than the typical programs (STEM)

- The need for cross-curriculum transferability via 21st Century Skills:

    - Soft Skills

    - Transferable Skills

- Moving away from the traditional skills to the marketable sustainable skills (i.e.: cultural competence; flexibility & adaptability; information, media and technological skills; learning & innovation; emotional intelligence, anticipation; contextual competence)
- Demographic shift from traditional learner to non-traditional learner (i.e., adults, single parents, returners/stop-outs)
  - Meeting students where they are to help them: reskill and upskill
  - Automation and high need for quicker degrees/education validation for economic and social mobility

Barriers and Challenges

- Cost/Financial aid will not cover certifications outside a degree curriculum
- Role of advisors and clarifying how certifications play a role in their degree and post-degree completion
- Both are important for the students and the universities-but no one talks about it
- No one asks questions because everyone is too busy
  - **Example**: University of Memphis mentioned asking about the CLEP exam and if students can earn credit for that to decrease the time to earn a degree. He asked someone in the registrar's office and that is possible! Went through the old files and found 15 years of CLEP exams with credit that could have been accepted as part of the students' major. People need to asks questions
- We need to have a champion on each campus that can encourage institutional buy-in (i.e., leadership, faculty, staff, deans)
- Lack of institutional communication
- Not knowing when projects and initiatives are occurring
- Episodic/ad hoc knowledge of new projects and goals
- Lack of personnel capacity to follow-through
- Lack of understanding of how this affects ROI for institutions (i.e., students go to different universities to earn a certificate, loss of funds and students)
- Hesitancy and lack of awareness
- A need to better understand where the workforce is going and why these controversial follow-through/spearheading this project onsite
- Cannot be a one-off conversation just to collect data