Formalizing the Intersection of Learning, High-Impact Practices, and Career Development Through Digital Learning Records

AAC&U Institute on Connecting the Undergraduate Experience | June 2-5, 2025

Ashley Finley, PhD

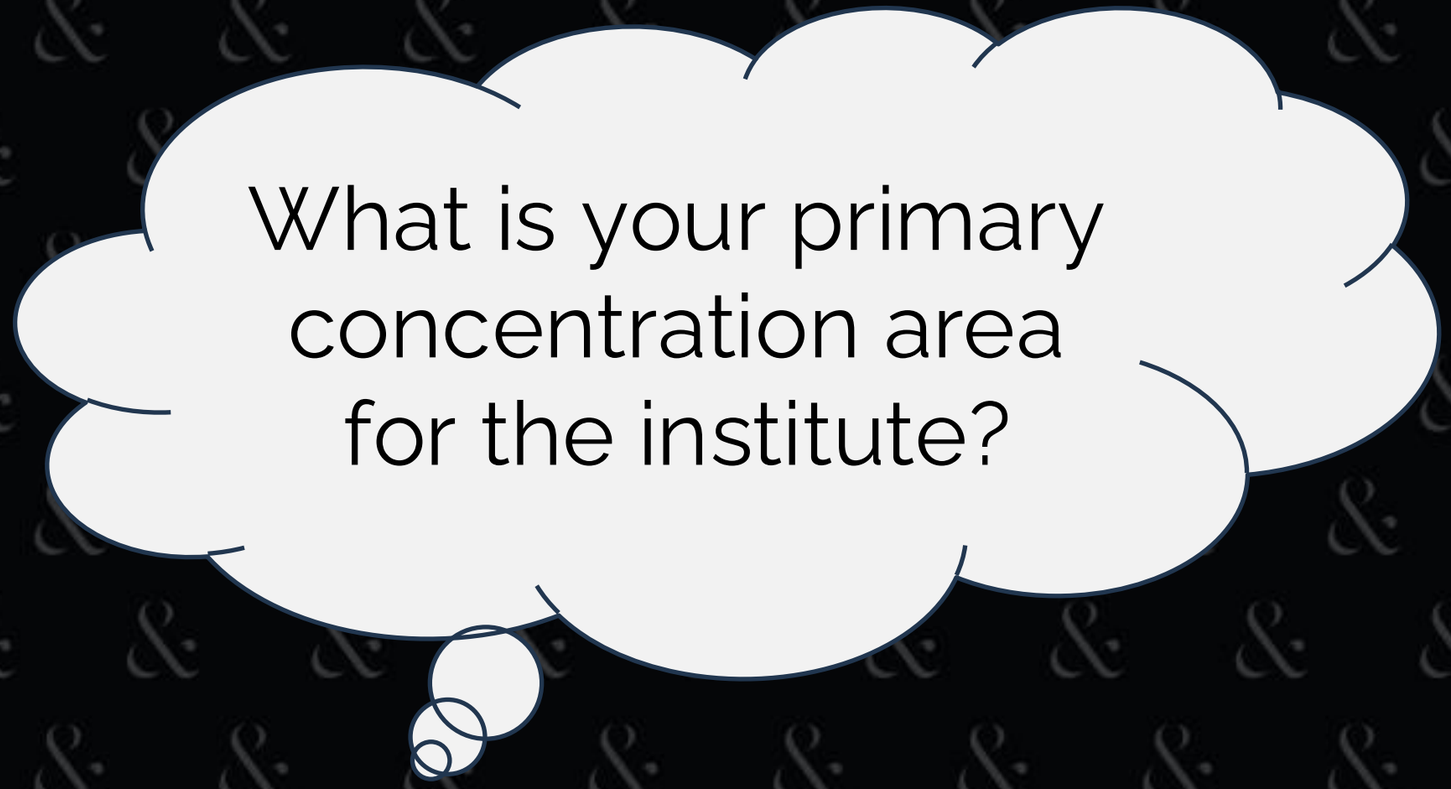
Vice President for Research & Senior Advisor to the President

Office of Research and Public Purpose, AAC&U

Mike Simmons, PhD

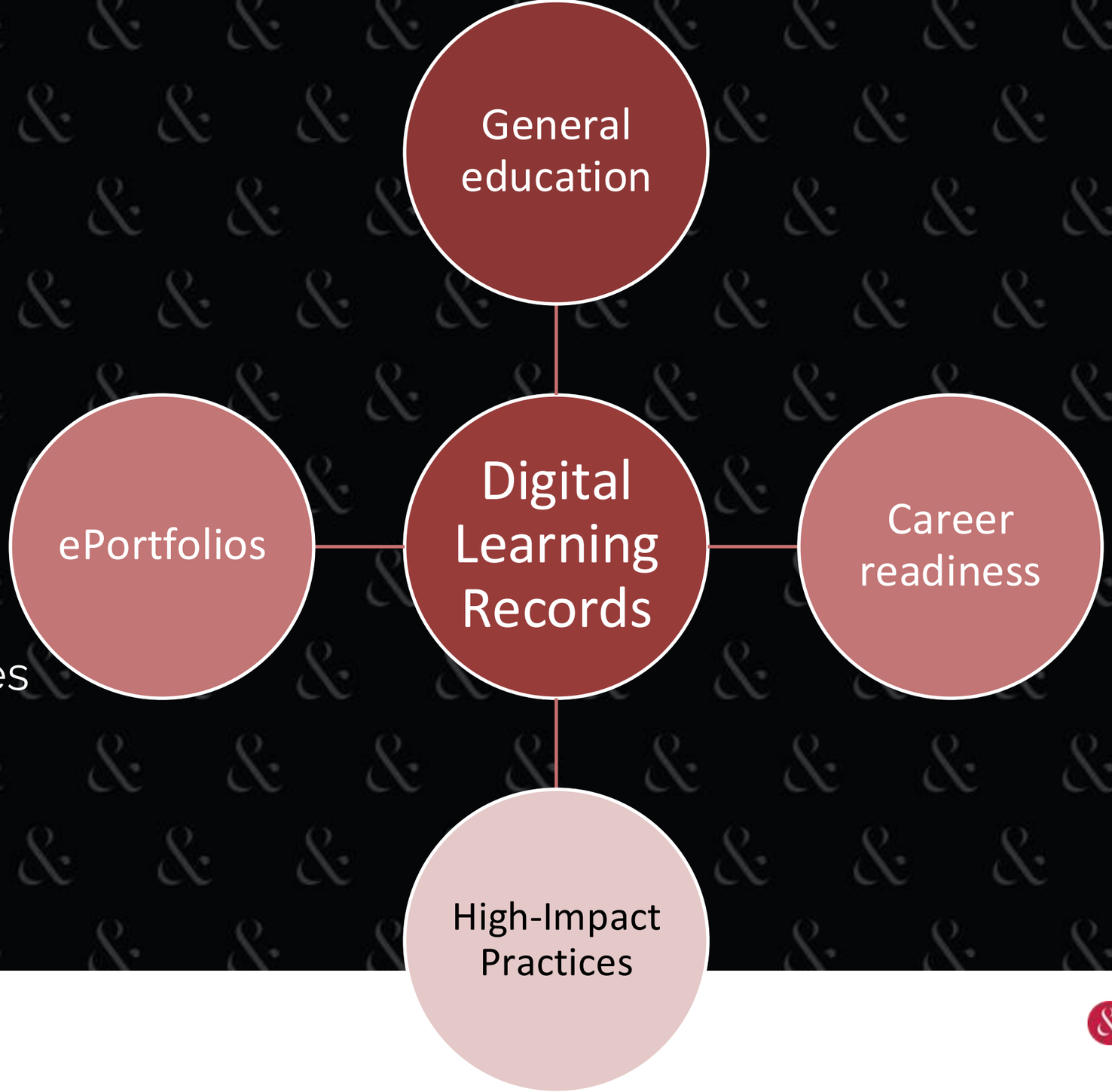
Associate Executive Director, Business Development and Strategic Partnerships

American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)


What is your primary concentration area for the institute?

What matters for connection?

- Explicit articulation of outcomes
- Quality assurance
- Alignment across outcomes and experiences
- Indicators of achievement




What brings you to this session?

AGENDA

1. Relevance
2. Transparency & Innovation
3. Collaboration

1 Relevance: Why is this important?

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COLUMN | FUTURE OF WORK

Higher Ed Should Pay Attention to the Corporate World's Growing Use of Skills Data

By Sean Gallagher (Columnist) Aug 10, 2023



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TWEET SHARE EMAIL

Employers these days are moving to skills-based hiring — looking for signs that candidates have specific abilities rather than just checking for a college degree as a default qualification

First, it is important for higher ed to recognize that digital credentialing…should not be limited to the discussion about non-degree "alternative credentials" and digital badges. Growing numbers of institutions are incorporating microcredentials into their degree programs at all levels (from associate and bachelor's to Ph.D.'s), as well as into continuing education activities and other educational experiences.

a.k.a. "Upskilling" & "Reskilling"

AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes (Released 2007)

Knowledge of Human Cultures & the Physical & Practical Worlds

- Disciplinary content

Personal & Social Responsibility

- Ethical Reasoning
- Civic Engagement
- Global Learning
- Foundations & Skills of Lifelong Learning
- Intercultural Knowledge & Competence

Intellectual & Practical Skills

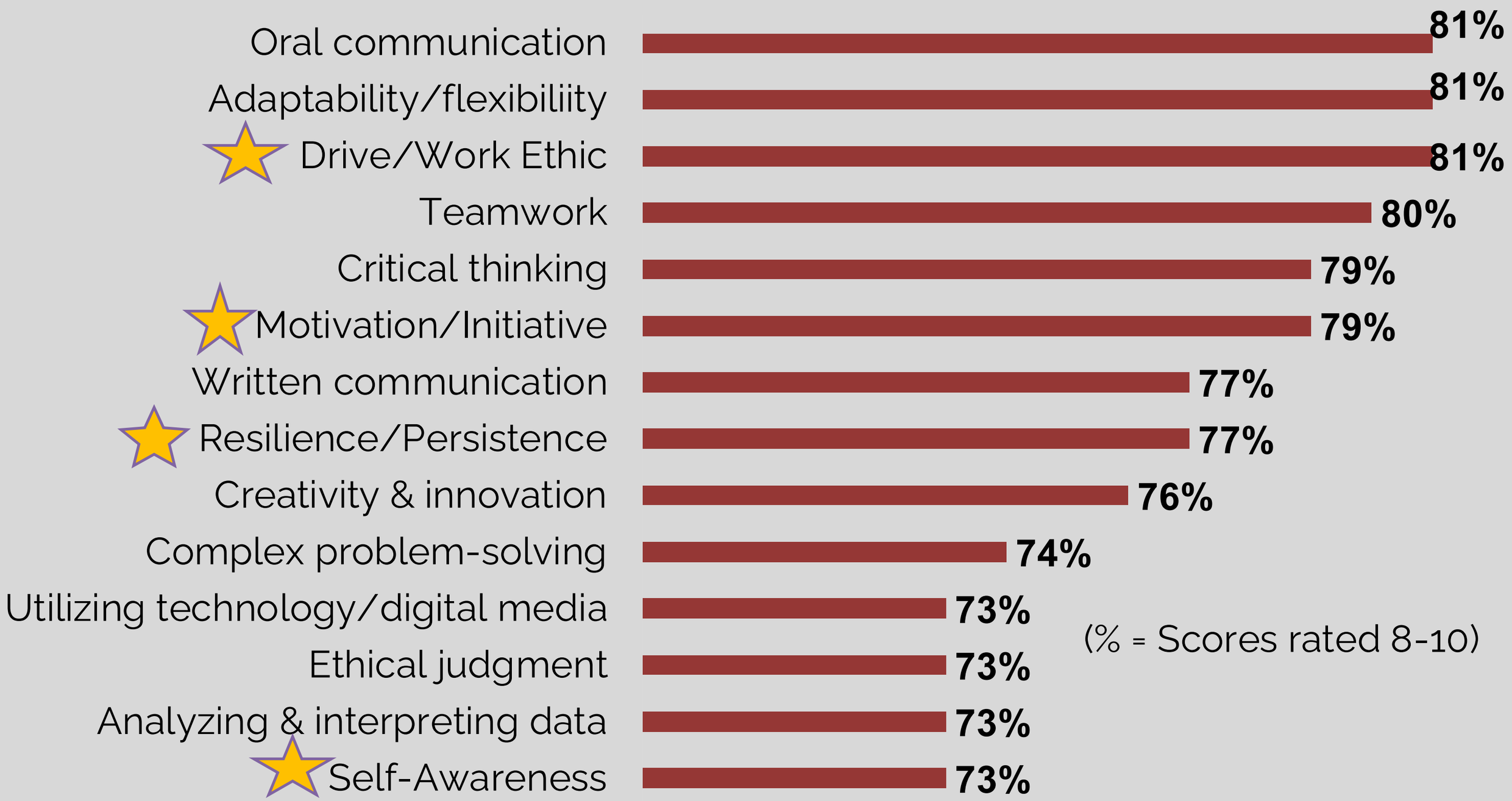
- Inquiry & Analysis
- Critical & Creative Thinking
- Written & Oral Communication
- Quantitative Literacy
- Information Literacy
- Problem-solving & Teamwork

Integrative & Applied Learning

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and special studies (Integrative Learning)

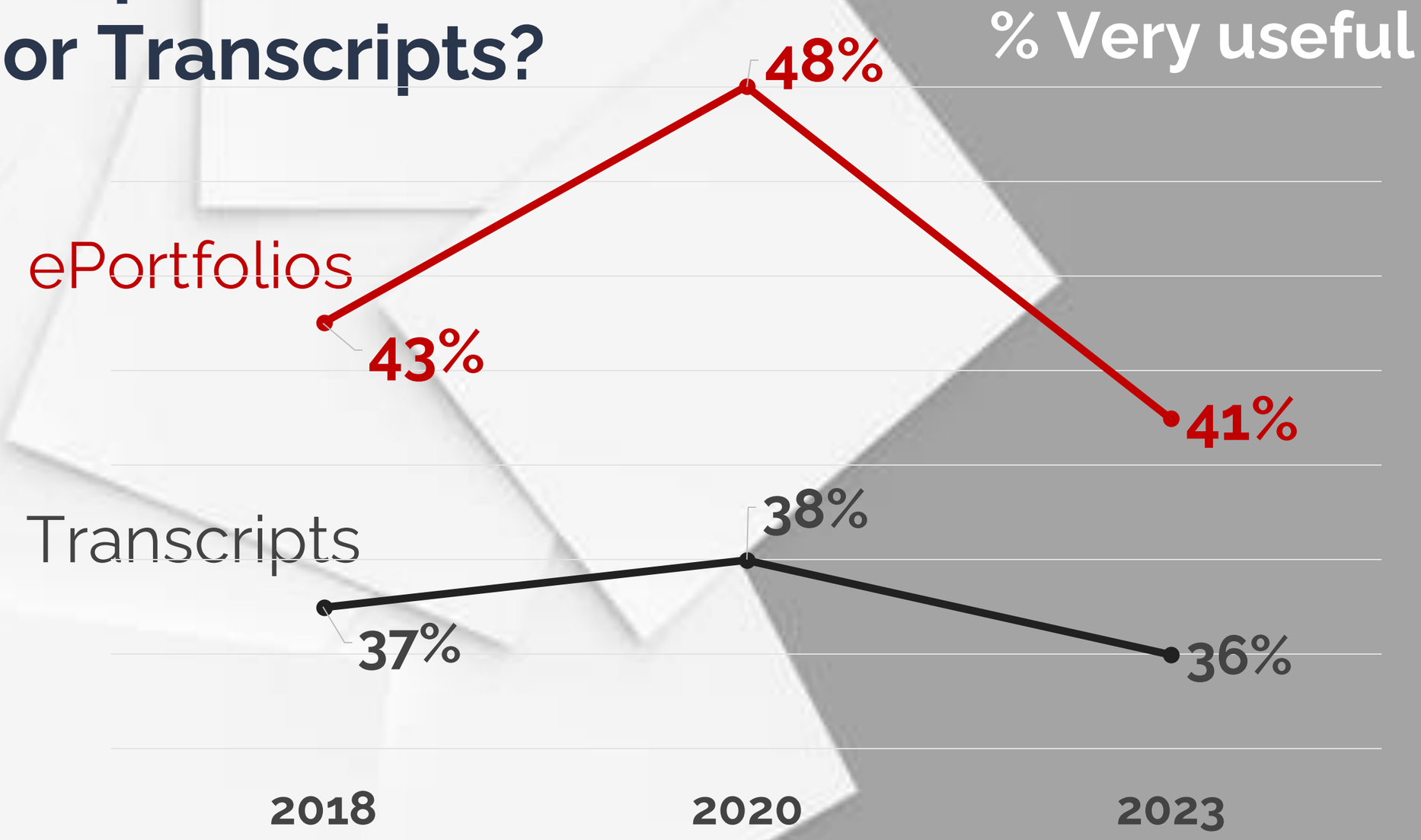
ACADEMIC & CAREER OUTCOME CROSSWALK

NACE CAREER COMPETENCIES		AAC&U LEARNING OUTCOMES
CAREER & SELF DEVELOPMENT	↔	INTEGRATIVE LEARNING FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING
COMMUNICATION	↔	WRITTEN COMMUNICATION ORAL COMMUNICARTION
CRITICAL THINKING	↔	CRITICAL THINKING INQUIRY & ANALYSIS
EQUITY & INCLUSION	↔	GLOBAL LEARNING INTERCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE & COMPETENCE
LEADERSHIP	↔	CREATIVE THINKING ETHICAL REASONING
PROFESSIONALISM	↔	INFORMATION LITERACY PROBLEM SOLVING
TEAMWORK	↔	TEAMWORK



Source: Finley, A., 2023, *The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say About the Difference College Makes*, AAC&U

Do employers prefer ePortfolios or Transcripts?



Source: Finley, A., 2023, *The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say About the Difference College Makes*, AAC&U

MICROCREDENTIALS

Employers who currently offer microcredentials **39%**

Employers who indicated they will offer microcredentials in the future **33%**

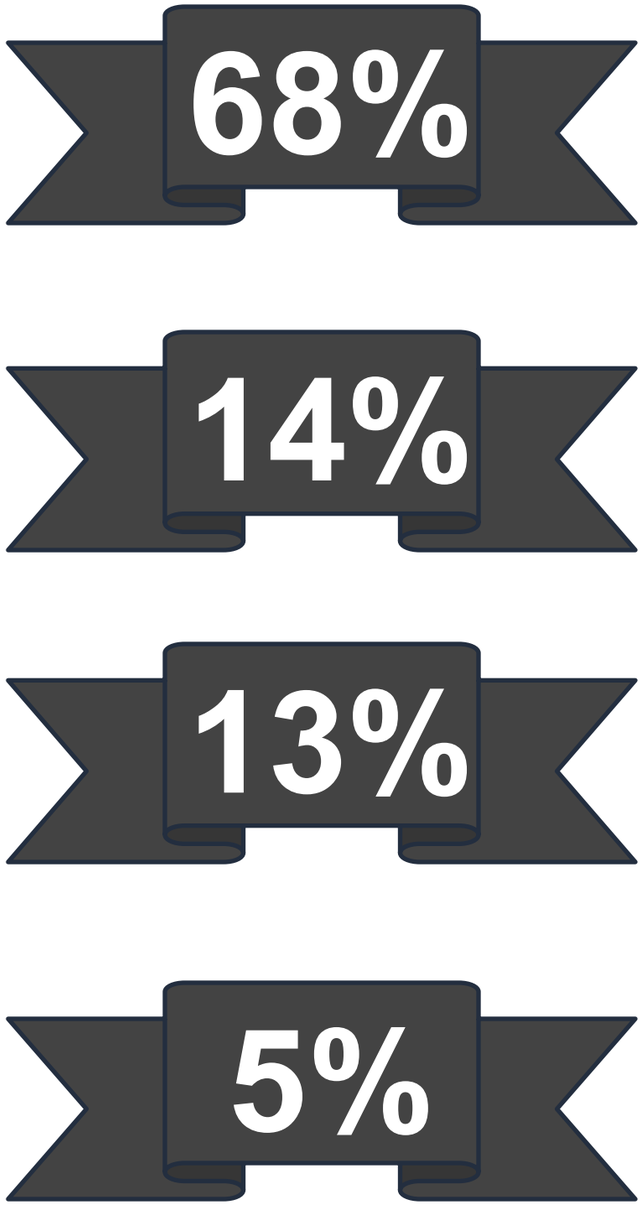
Source: Finley, A., 2023, *The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say About The Difference College Makes*, AAC&U

College degree **+ microcredential**

College degree **(only)**

High school diploma **PLUS microcredential**

High school diploma **(only)**



PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS THAT RANKED #1

Source: Finley, A., 2023, *The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say About The Difference College Makes*, AAC&U

Strength of a job candidate with a microcredential in a...

Broad skill (e.g., leadership, teamwork)	64% (Somewhat or Much Stronger)
Technical skill (e.g., coding, data management)	68% (Somewhat or Much Stronger)

Source: Finley, A., 2023, *The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say About The Difference College Makes*, AAC&U

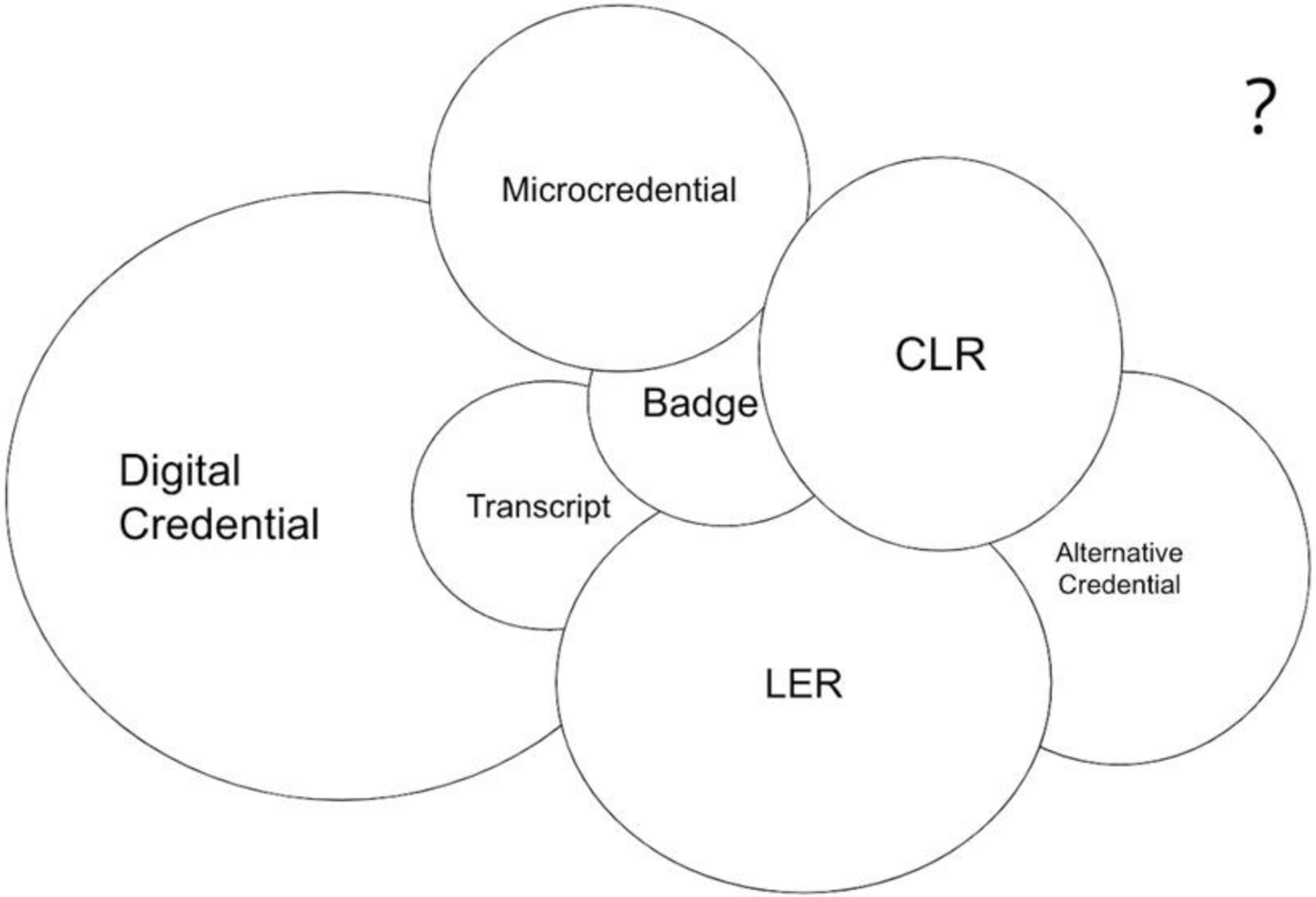
2

Transparency & Innovation: How do we make change real and authentic?

What are the **leverage points** for this conversation on campus?

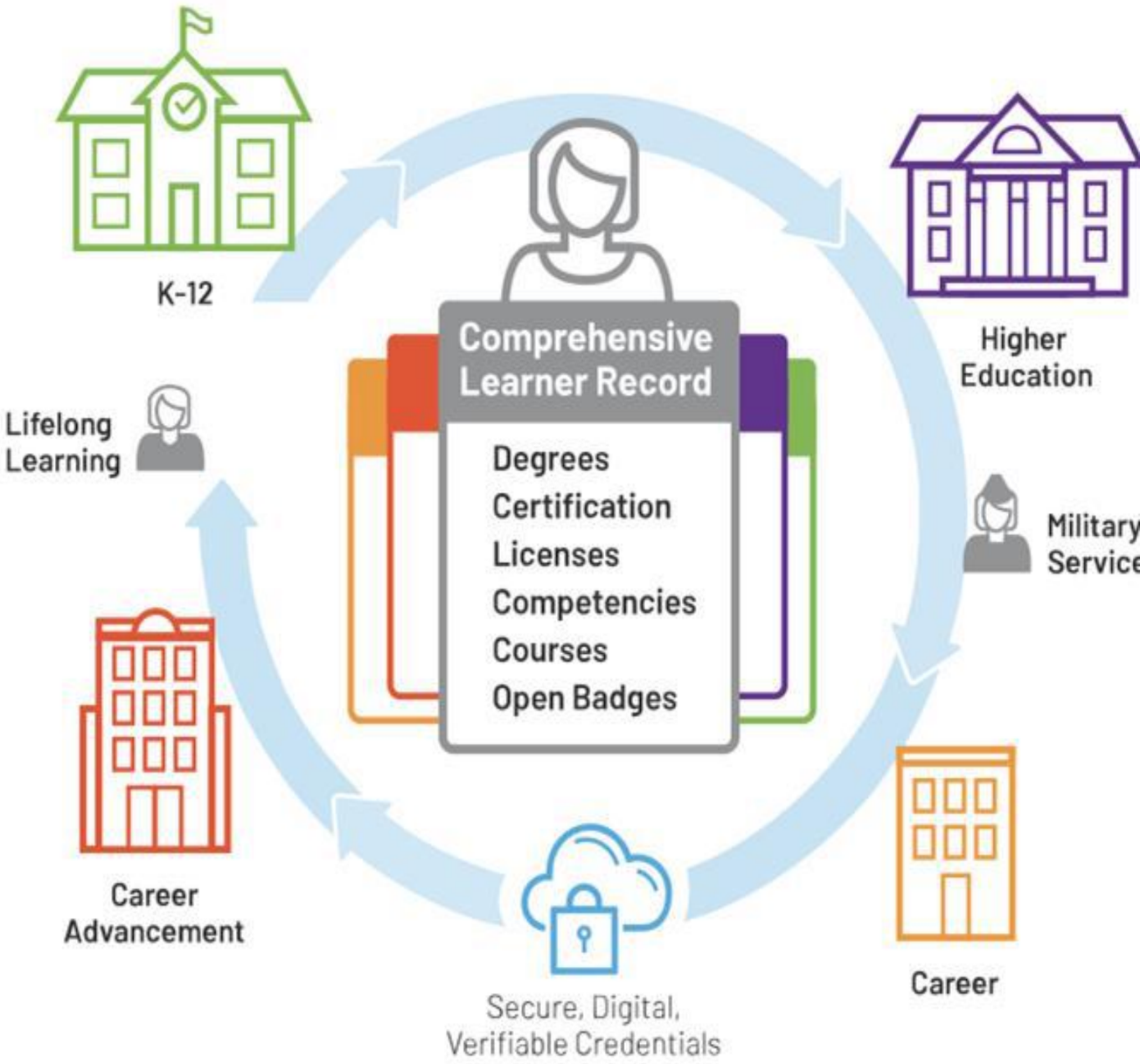
What are the **challenges**?

Are we saying the same thing?



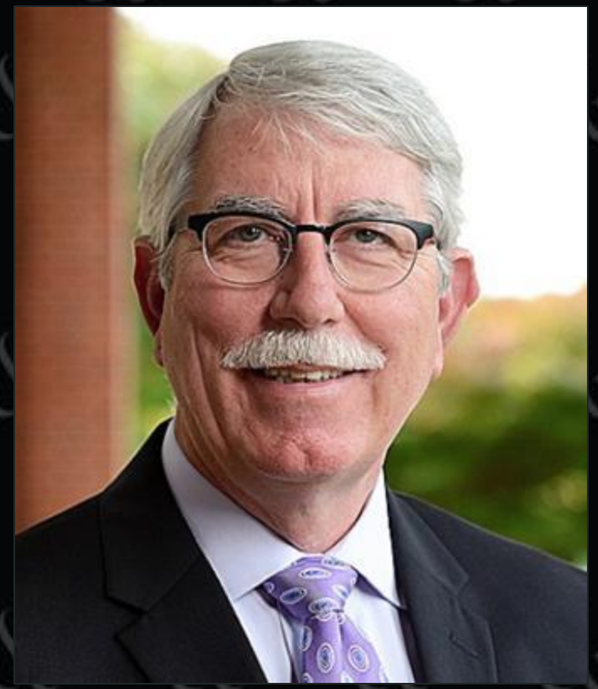
Learning & Employment Records (LERs) & Comprehensive Learner Records (CLRs)

- Student-owned
- Portable
- Shared meaning



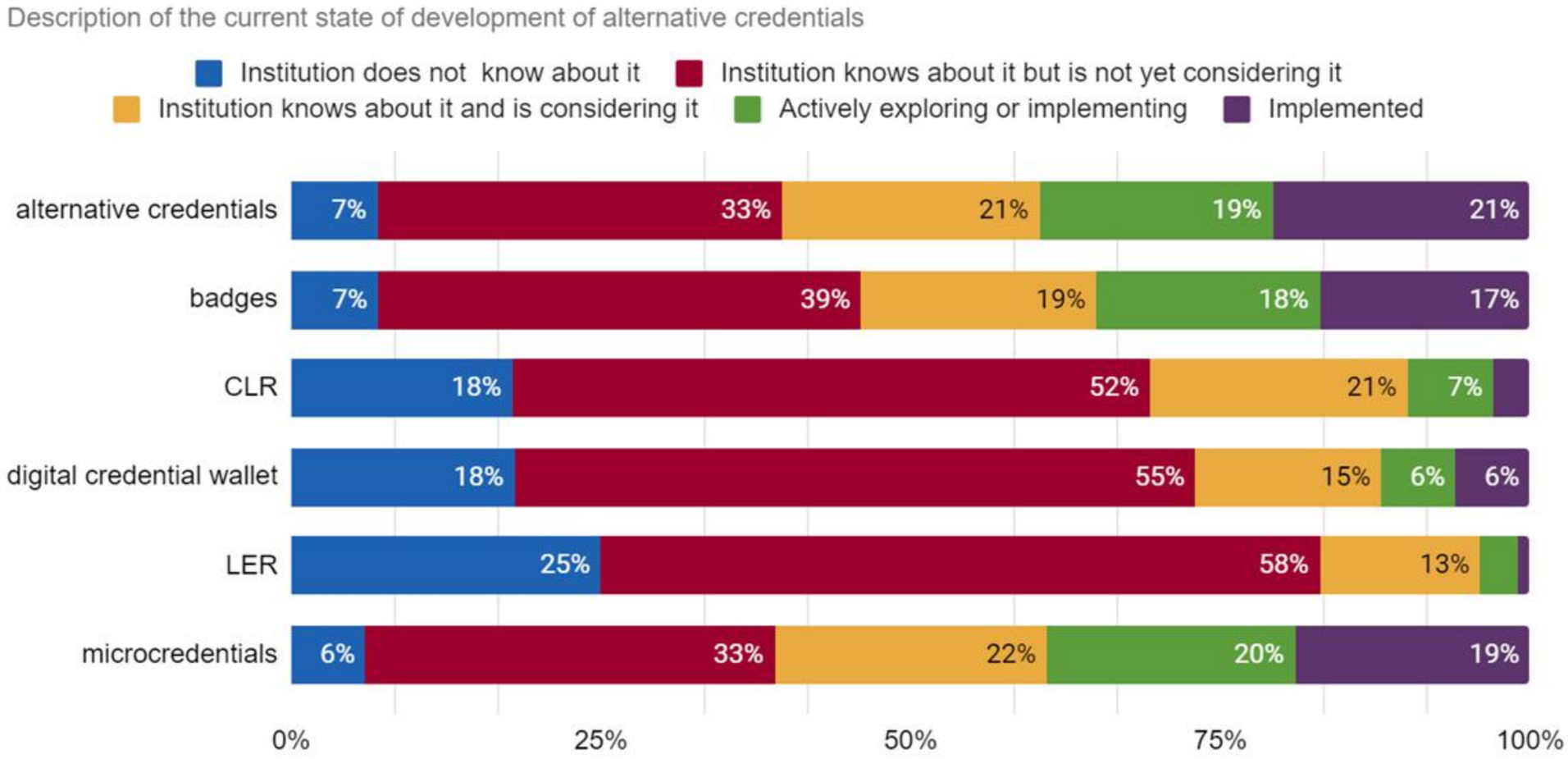
FALL 2011			ATT	ERN	GRD	QPT	GPA
AGR	100	INTRODUCTION TO AGRICULTURE *REPEATED 1/15/2012	0.0	0.0	D	0.0	
CIS	101	PERSONAL COMPUTER APPLI	3.0	3.0	B	9.0	
COM	105	PUBLIC SPEAKING	3.0	3.0	C	6.0	
MTH	130	COLLEGE ALGEBRA	0.0	0.0	W	0.0	
SEMESTER TOTALS			9.0	9.0		15.0	1.670
CUMULATIVE TOTALS			6.0	6.0		15.0	2.500

SPRING 2012			ATT	ERN	GRD	QPT	GPA
AGR	100	INTRODUCTION TO AGRICULTURE	3.0	3.0	A	12.0	
BIO	100	LIFE SCIENCE	4.0	4.0	B	12.0	
PHL	105	INTRO TO ETHICS	3.0	3.0	B	9.0	
ENG	101	COMPOSITION I	3.0	3.0	A	12.0	
SEMESTER TOTALS			13.0	13.0		45.0	3.462
CUMULATIVE TOTALS			19.0	19.0		60	3.158

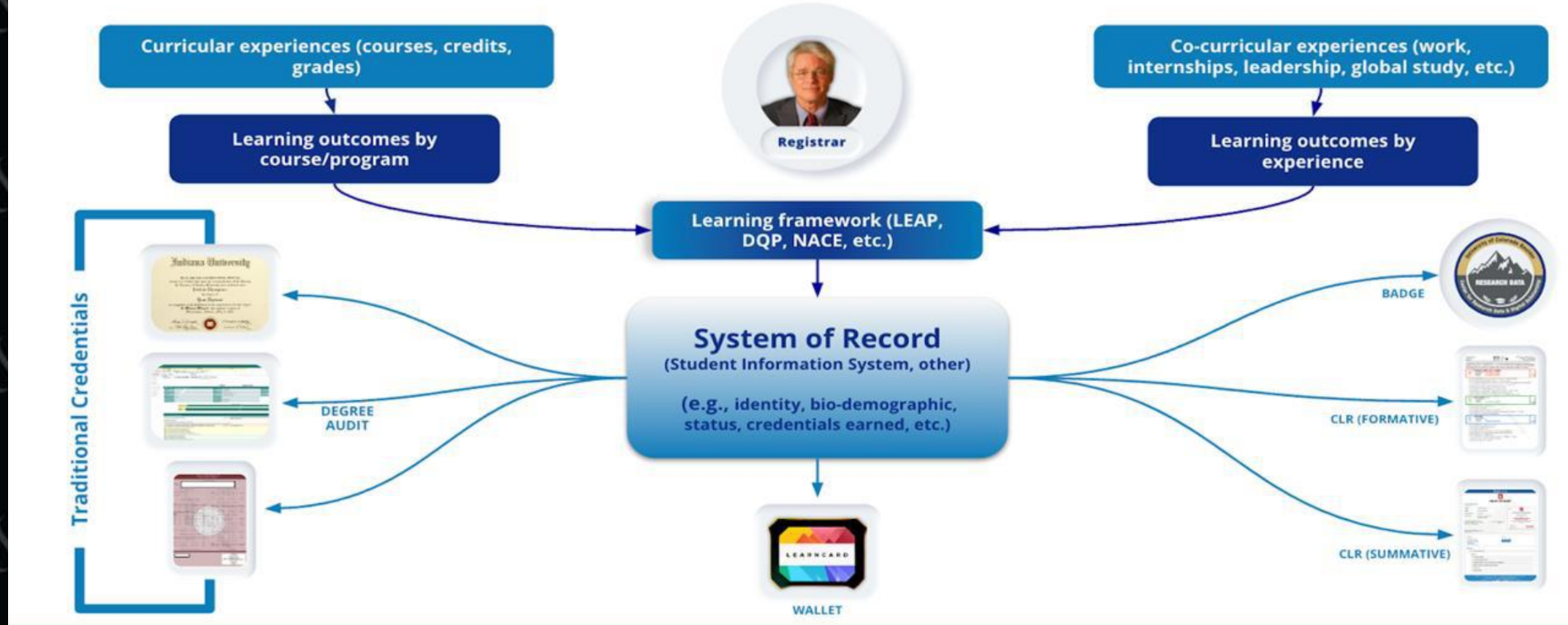


The transcript "is a record of everything the student has forgotten." – Tom Black, former registrar, Stanford University

Data from the field:



Higher Education Credentials

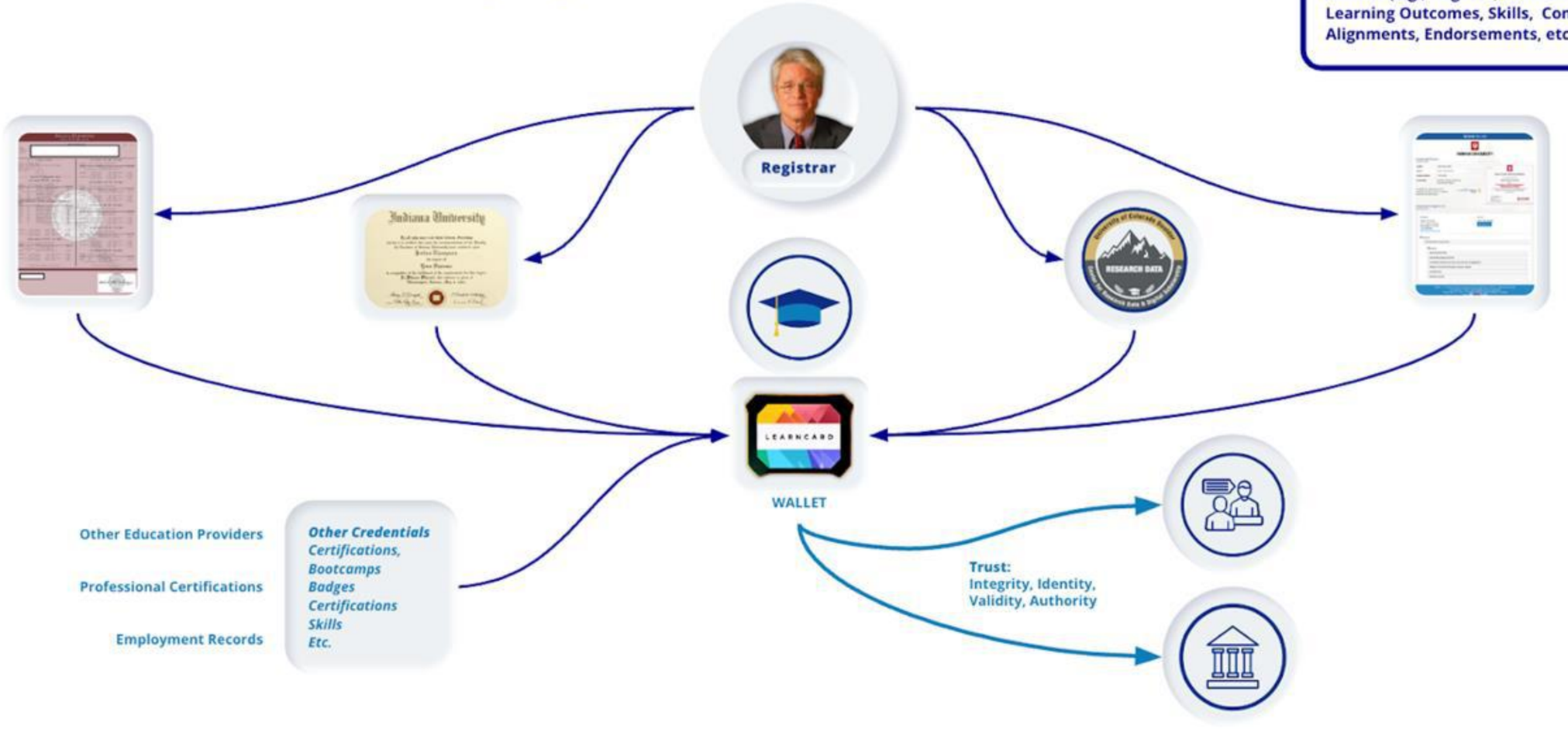


AACRAO

AACRAO Leadership Meeting 2023 3

Learner and Employment Records (LERs)

Awards (e.g., Degrees, Certificates, etc.)
Learning Outcomes, Skills, Competencies
Alignments, Endorsements, etc.



WHAT STORY ARE YOUR CREDENTIALS TELLING?

- Do they communicate the full value of your educational offerings ?
- Are they speaking a language that resonates with learners and employers ?
- Are they passive transcripts of the past or active assets for the future?

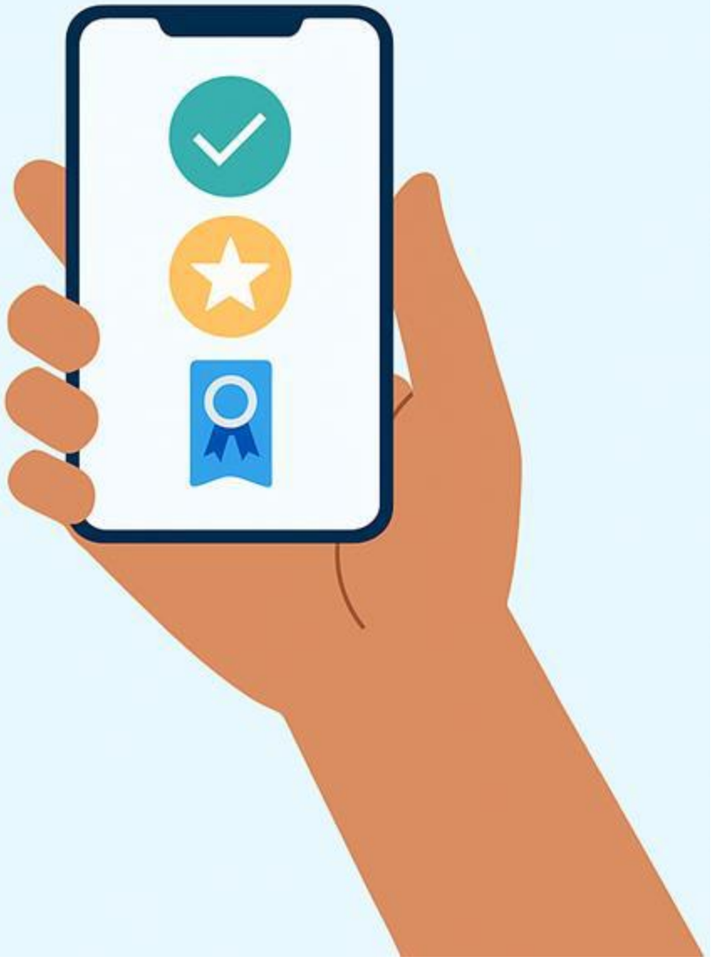


What: The Products or Actions

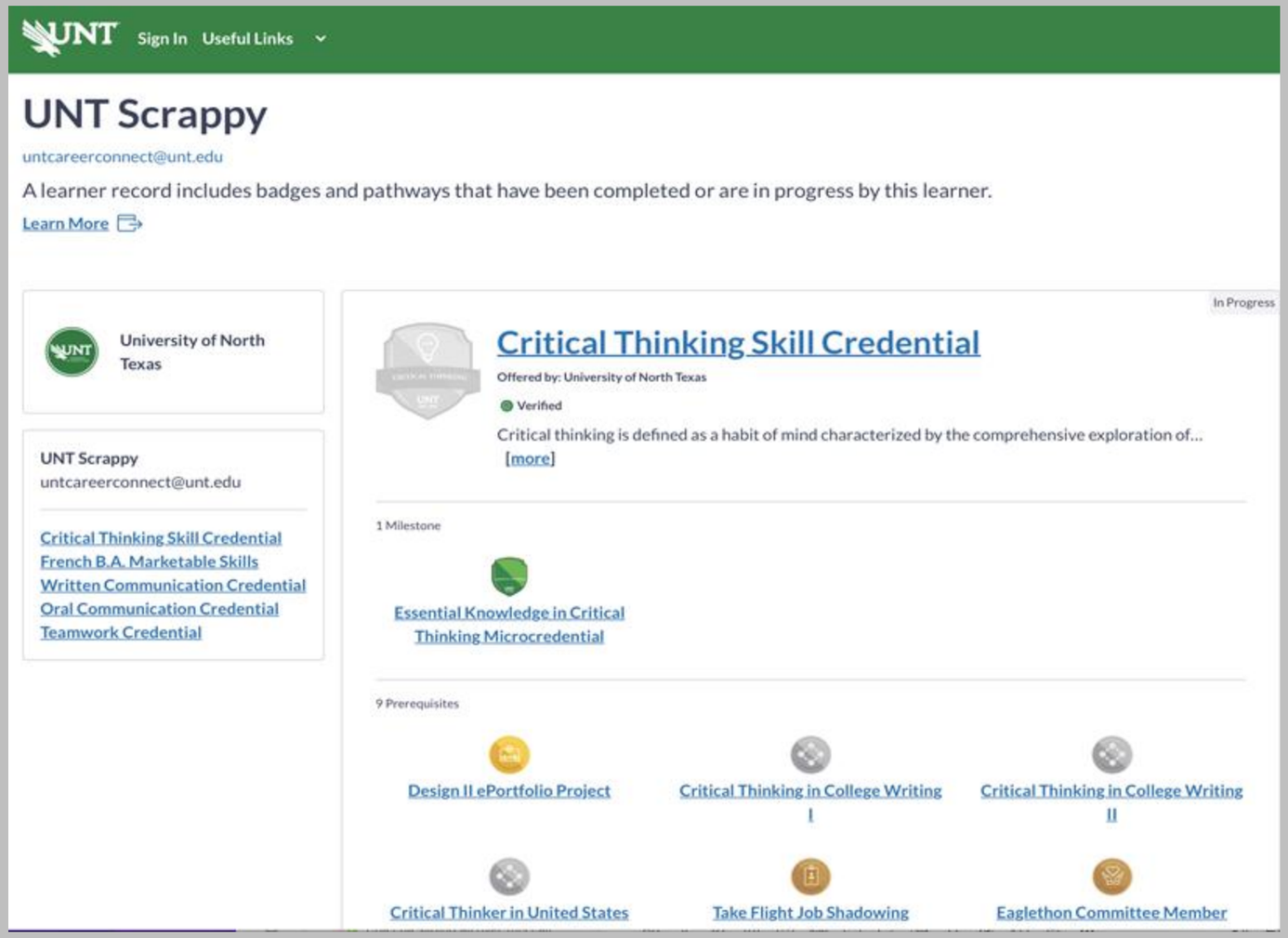
Issuing microcredentials, badges, CLRs, and stackable credentials across programs.

This is what people see and touch—the tangible artifacts:

- The digital badges in a student's wallet
- The skills listed in a CLR
- The short-term credential aligned to an industry standard

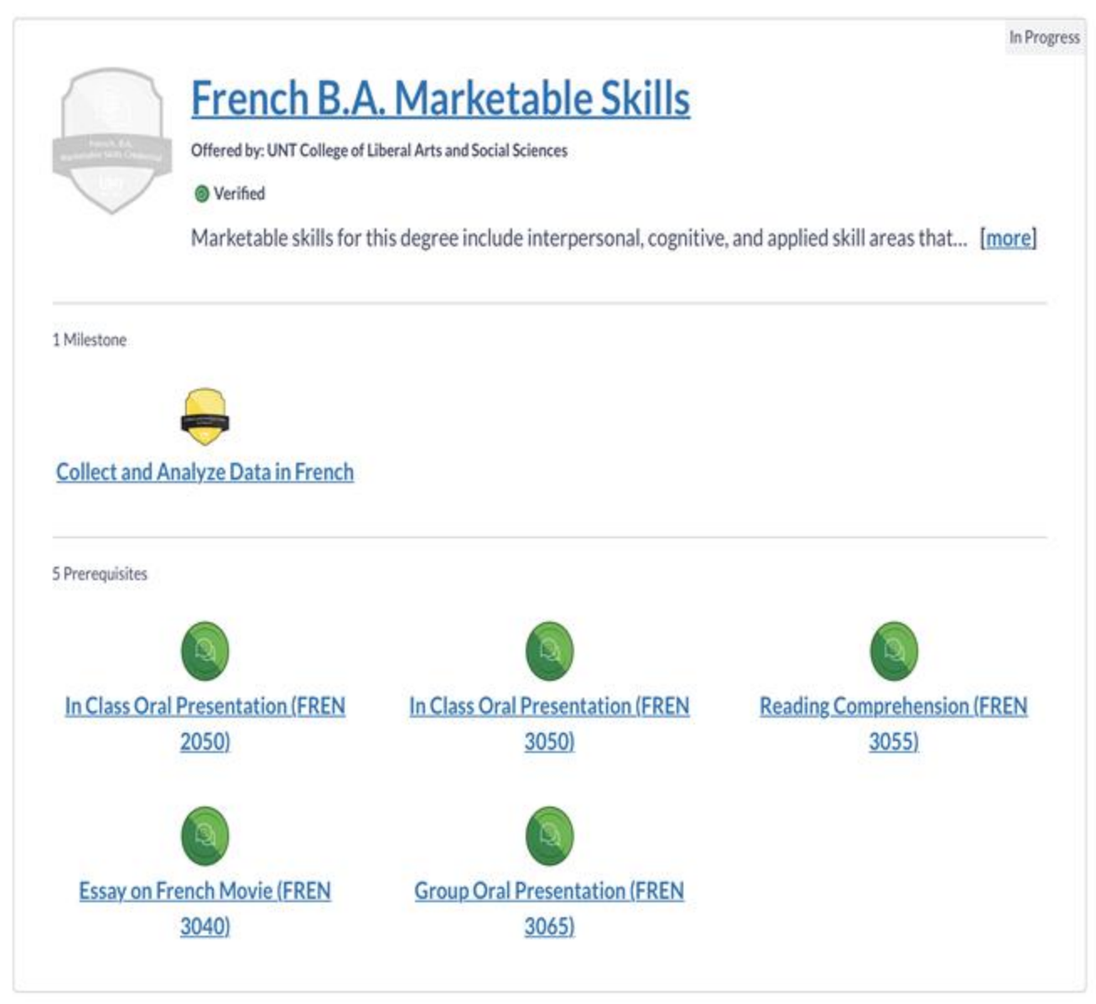


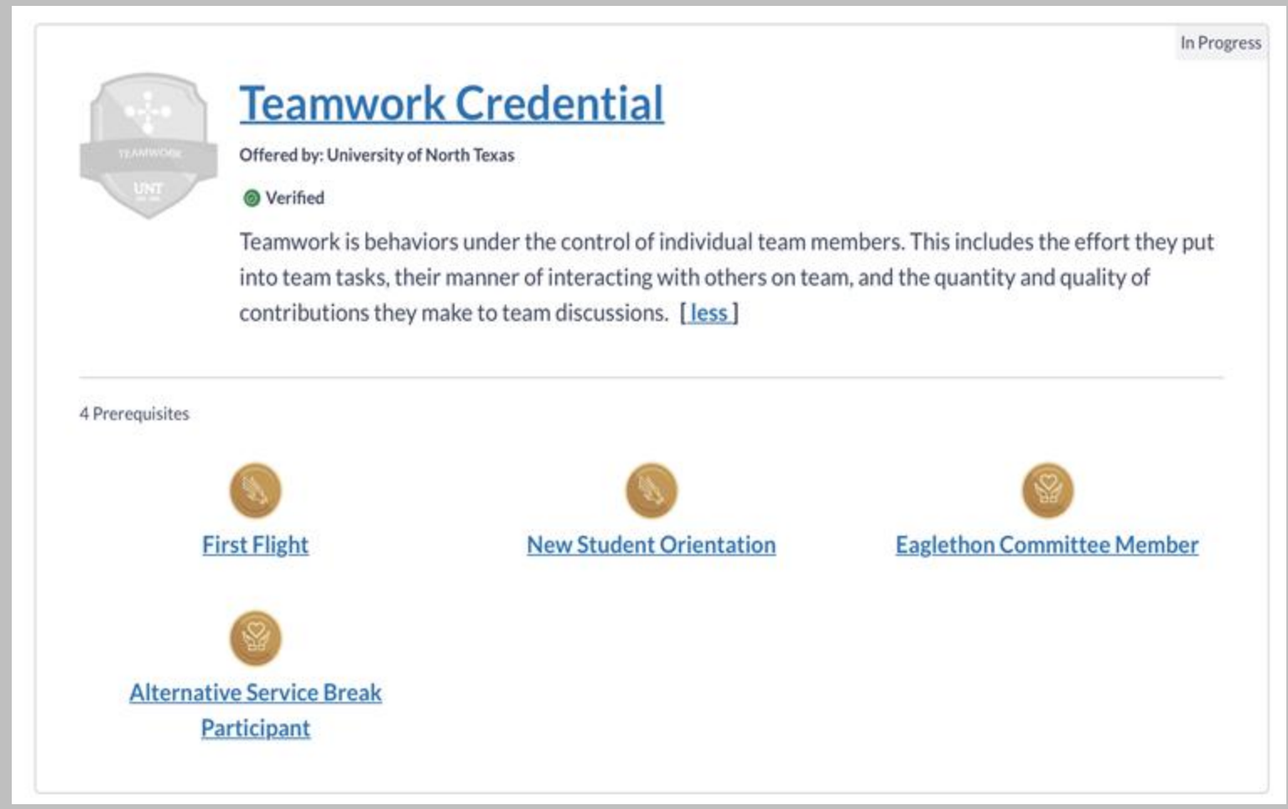
Campus Examples: University of North Texas

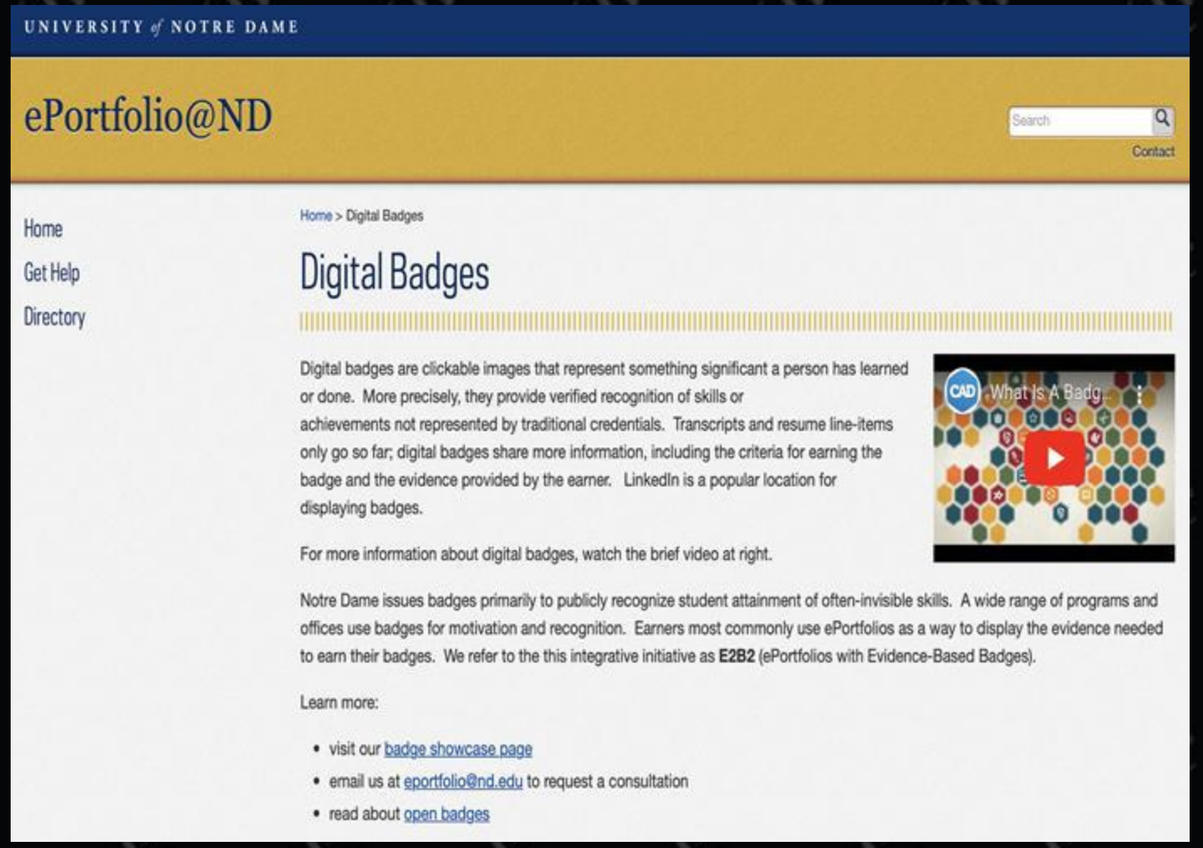


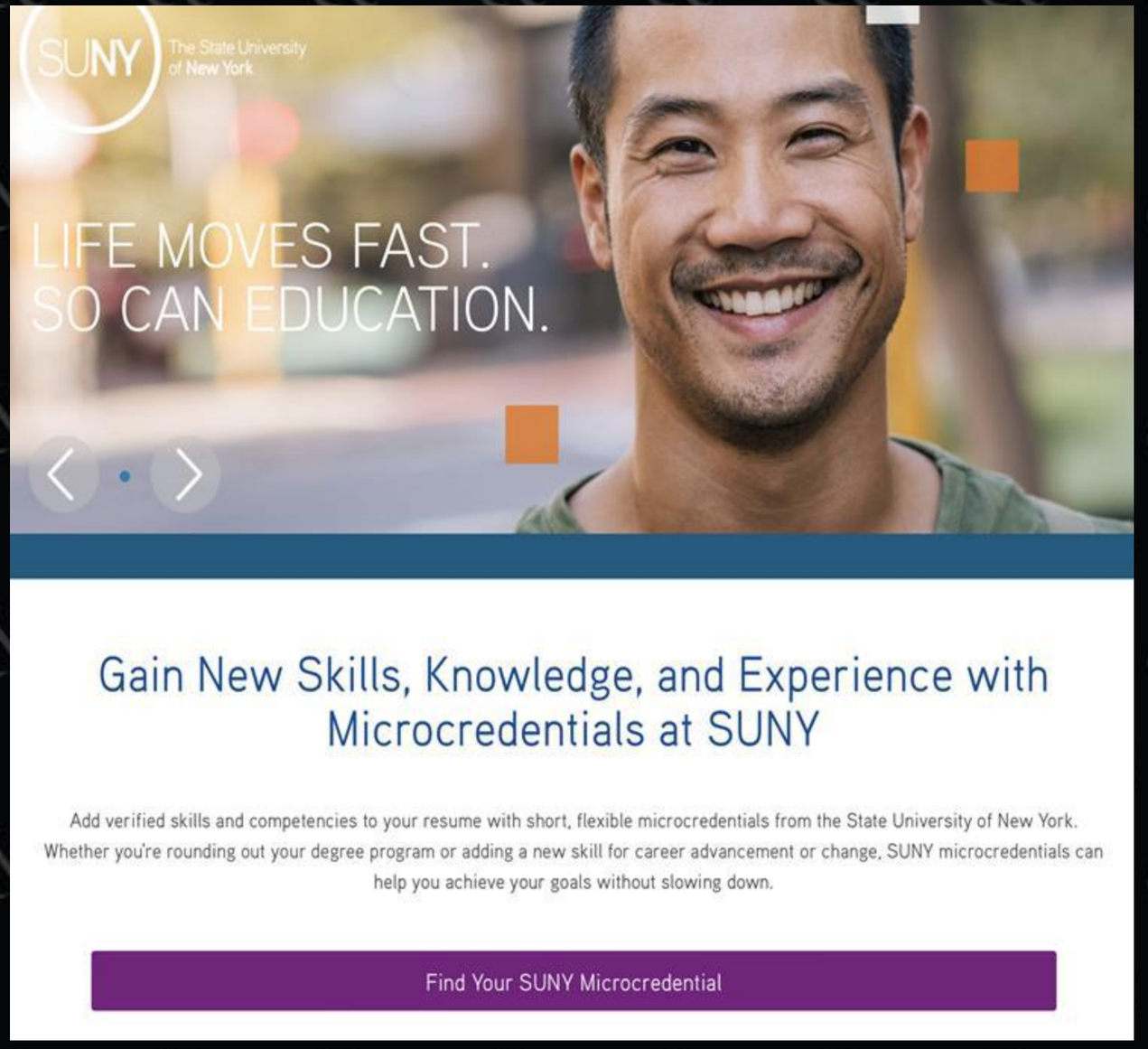
https://unt.badgr.com/public/learner-records/myk5Uk8LS1tE

Disciplinary Connections






UNIVERSITY of NOTRE DAME
ePortfolio@ND
Search
Contact
Home
Get Help
Directory
Home > Digital Badges
Digital Badges
Digital badges are clickable images that represent something significant a person has learned or done. More precisely, they provide verified recognition of skills or achievements not represented by traditional credentials. Transcripts and resume line-items only go so far; digital badges share more information, including the criteria for earning the badge and the evidence provided by the earner. LinkedIn is a popular location for displaying badges.
What Is A Badg...
For more information about digital badges, watch the brief video at right.
Notre Dame issues badges primarily to publicly recognize student attainment of often-invisible skills. A wide range of programs and offices use badges for motivation and recognition. Earners most commonly use ePortfolios as a way to display the evidence needed to earn their badges. We refer to the this integrative initiative as E2B2 (ePortfolios with Evidence-Based Badges).
Learn more:
visit our badge showcase page
email us at eportfolio@nd.edu to request a consultation
read about open badges


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3

Collaboration: Who are the people in your neighborhood?

If your team was leading the charge to implement digital learning records, who would you talk to first? **Why**?

Building a Campus Coalition for LER Success

Who's at Your Table?

Executive Leadership

Provide strategic oversight, ensuring cross-campus alignment, authority, and resources to sustain your LER initiative.

Continuing, Professional, & Online Education

Often lead credential innovation for adult and workforce learners. Bring critical expertise and often manages non-degree credentials not captured in traditional systems.

Registrar & Enrollment Management

Serve as institutional stewards of academic records and policies. Ensure new credentials uphold institutional integrity and trust.

Academic Affairs, Faculty, & Curriculum Committees

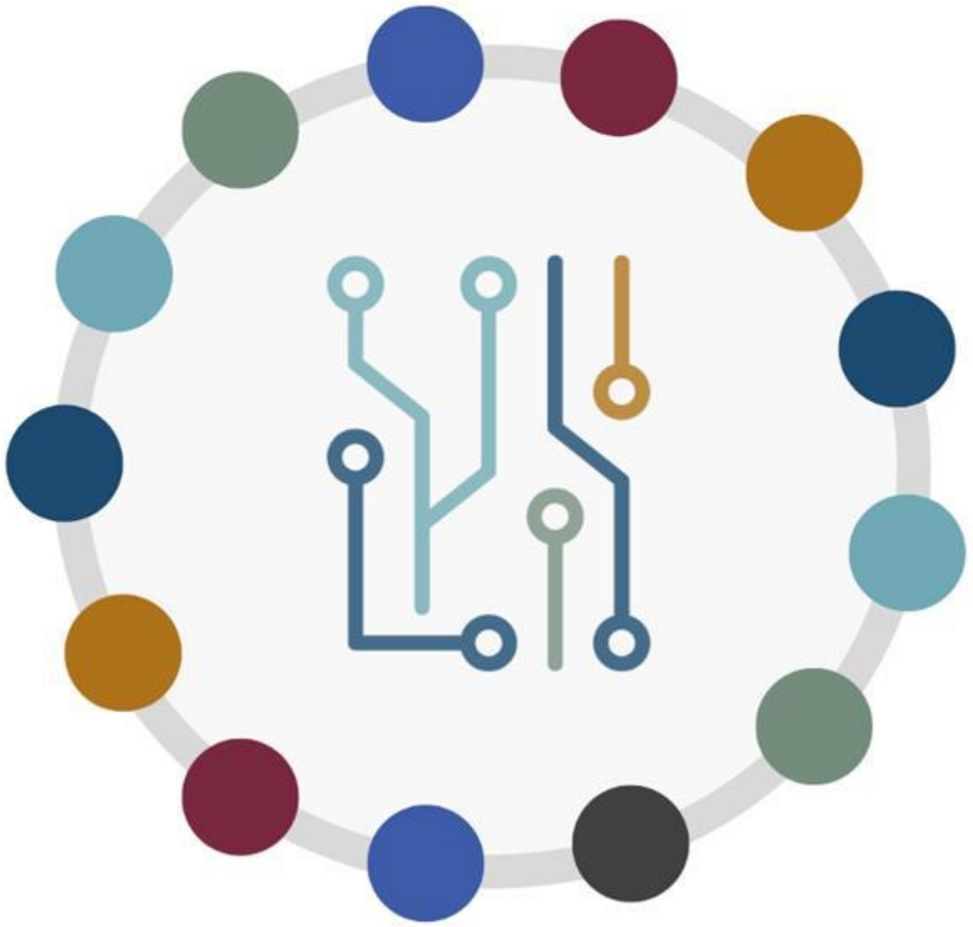
Safeguard academic quality and help integrate credentials into curriculum design and learning outcomes.

IT Leadership

Ensure infrastructure supports credential interoperability, security, and scalability.

Career Services & Employer Relations

Align credentials with employer needs, shaping content and formats that resonate in hiring.



Institutional Research & Effectiveness

Measure impact, uptake, and alignment with institutional goals like equity and student success.

Student Affairs & Co-Curricular Programs

Capture learning beyond the classroom, using trusted frameworks to credential leadership, engagement, and wellness.

Assessment & Accreditation

Ensure alignment with quality standards and help anticipate compliance needs.

Learning Support & Libraries

Enhance credential literacy, manage access to tools, and support digital archiving.

Advisors & Student Success Professionals

Guide learners in understanding and applying credentials in academic and career contexts.

Learner Representatives

Offer vital perspectives on usability and value, ensuring credentials meet real user needs.

Off-Campus Stakeholders

Help ensure your LER efforts are aligned with labor market demands and public priorities.

Collaborators for Digital Learning Records

Registrar

- Tagging experiences
- Oversight of transcript/student records
- Accountability

Advisors

- Communication
- Advocacy
- Sense-making

Instructional Designers

- Application to courses
- Assignment design
- Interdisciplinary design and idea generation

Institutional Research

- Equity metrics
- Post-graduation metrics
- Connecting data across divisions
- Data architecture

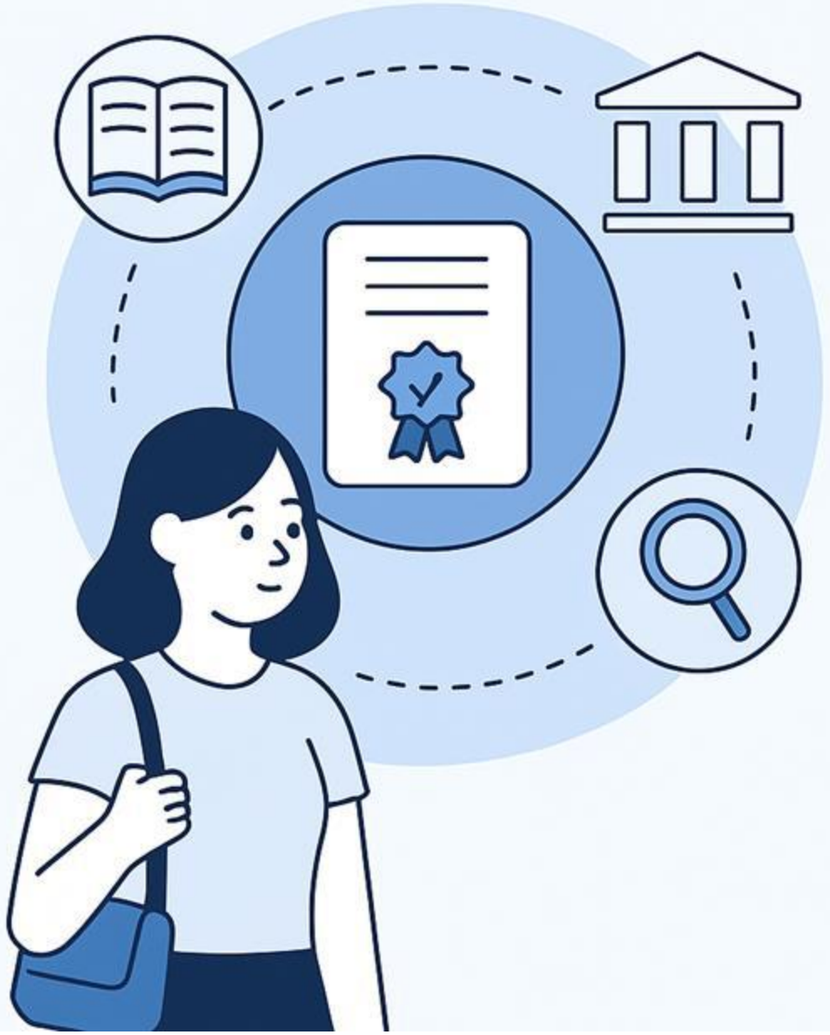
IT

- Infrastructure
- Support
- Web support

Marketing & Communications

- Visualization
- Testimonials
- Story-telling

Effective credentials are designed with learners as the primary stakeholders



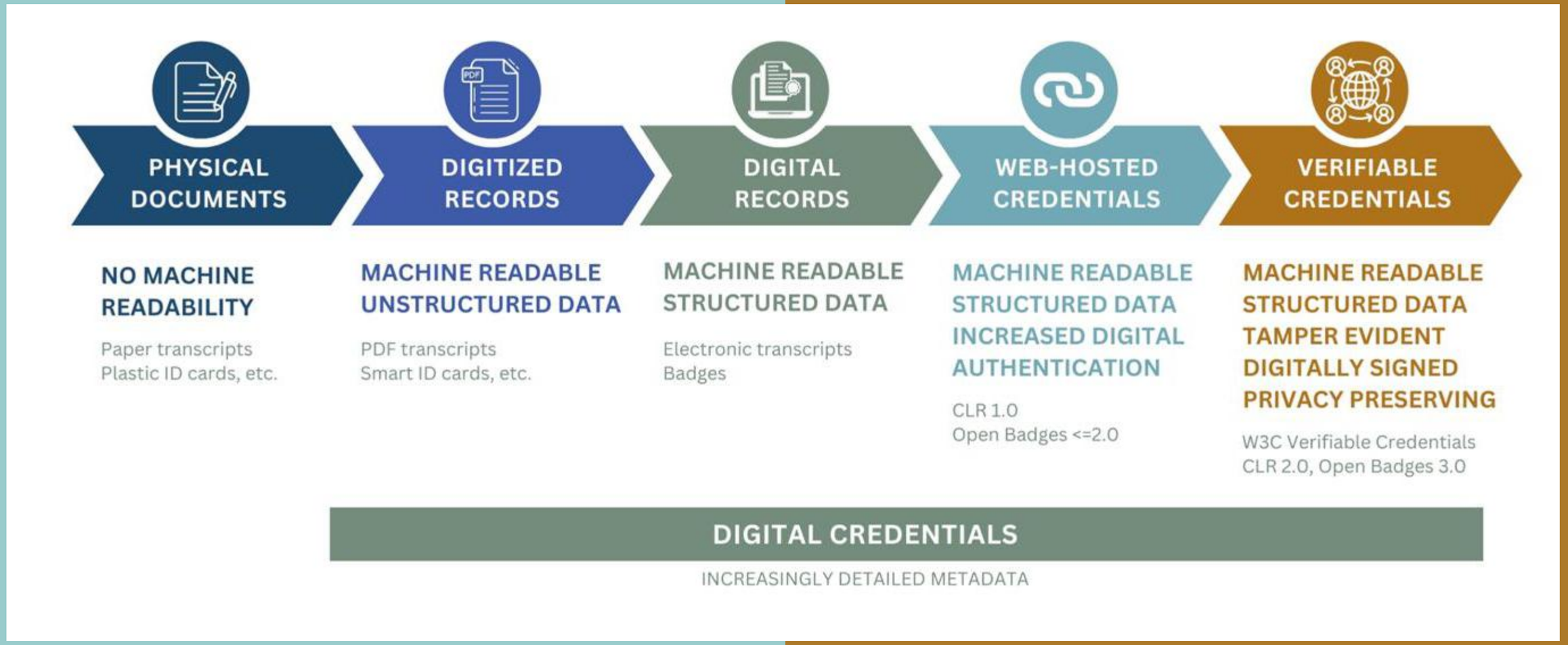
- Learner-first credentials are understandable without specialized knowledge
- They’re portable across platforms and recognized by relevant stakeholders
- They’re designed for discovery by employers and other institutions
- They support lifelong learning by connecting to broader credential ecosystems

Relevance of Formal Education

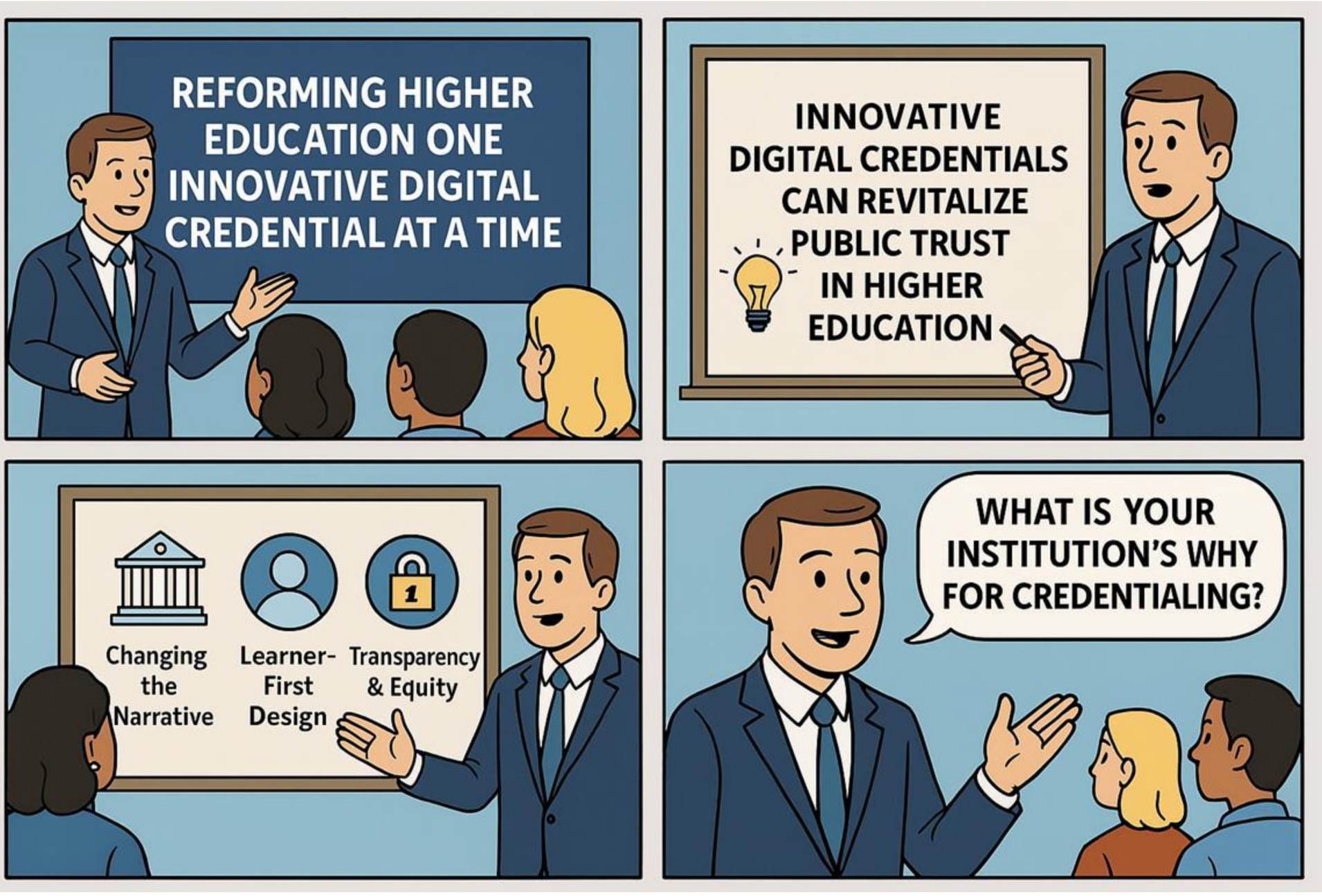
Exploring the decline in perceived value of traditional education and how digital credentials can address this challenge by aligning educational outcomes with real-world skills



LERs as a Process



The creation and adoption of LERs is a continuum, moving from physical documents to basic records to more sophisticated digital credentials.


REFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION ONE INNOVATIVE DIGITAL CREDENTIAL AT A TIME
INNOVATIVE DIGITAL CREDENTIALS CAN REVITALIZE PUBLIC TRUST IN HIGHER EDUCATION
Changing the Narrative
Learner-First Design
Transparency & Equity
1
WHAT IS YOUR INSTITUTION'S WHY FOR CREDENTIALING?



LER ACCELERATOR INITIATIVE

The LER Accelerator initiative seeks to boost the adoption of Learning and Employment Records (LERs) in post-secondary education. Launched in 2024 by a coalition of leading national organizations, the initiative empowers campuses to design, develop, and scale systems that support more accessible, transparent, and learner-centered credentialing practices.

Vision

Our vision is to transform post-secondary education by accelerating the widespread adoption of LERs, empowering learners to seamlessly showcase their skills and achievements while facilitating transparent and efficient pathways to employment.

Key Goals

- Expanding awareness of LERs
- Sharing best practices
- Establishing integrity in LER-credentialed systems
- Promoting interoperability
- Addressing technical hurdles
- Envisioning long-term changes in the higher education landscape

Innovative Credentials →

LER Accelerator →

Infuse

- AAC&U
- AACC
- AACRAO
- ACE
- AIR
- C-BEN
- Digital Credentials Consortium
- 1 EdTech
- Educause
- NACADA
- NACE
- NASPA
- UPCEA
- 1 EdTech

What is one thing you **learned**?

What is one **question** you still have?

Final Reflection: The K. Patricia Cross One Minute Essay…

Thank you!

American Association of Colleges & Universities

aacrao-logo_t

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