
EXTENDING THE CREDENTIAL EMPOWERING THE LEARNER



While the unemployment rate was a whopping 8 percent in 2013, those holding a B.A. degree found their unemployment rate hovering at only 4 percent, almost half the national average. What's more, millennial college graduates earn more—about \$17,500—than those with just a high school diploma. Clearly, academic credentials have never been more valuable or more central to the life chances of learners and their families.

With this high-stakes status comes high-stakes challenges: the rising cost of college, mounting student debt, parents questioning high costs, and employers who want proof of hard and soft occupational skills that are part and parcel of academic achievement. At the same time, the importance of credentials has created an

increasing number of non-academic education providers—boot camps and others—that are beginning to challenge the monopoly that higher education has over credentialing. Never before have colleges and universities been under so much pressure to demonstrate the value of their programs in terms of what their graduates know and can do.

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Of all these challenges, perhaps none is more front and center than aligning learner outcomes with the job market. Today, the majority of undergraduate enrollments are in majors connected to occupational fields—teacher training, nursing, engineering, marketing, accounting—providing the hard skills employers are looking for. But as any academic knows, higher education has never been about just majors, courses, grades and credits. Our colleges and universities offer a wealth of opportunities for students to extend their formal learning experience beyond the classroom, enabling them to build critical thinking, leadership, group collaboration and other soft skills. What the market wants is exactly what higher education does: preparing students for the workforce. Why then are we graduating our students without documenting these critical learning outcomes?

As Kevin Carey put so well in his recent *New York Times* article, "The standard diploma has roughly the same amount of information that prisoners of war are required to divulge under the Geneva Conventions." And therein lies our opportunity. Our learners and their potential employers are asking for more comprehensive credentialing. The expectation now for higher education is not to simply generate a beautiful ornament to hang on the wall but to demonstrate outcomes, providing learners with currency that's going to help get them a job. With the great responsibility of educating our future workforce comes a pressing need for change. The time has come to further empower our learners by aligning credentialing with their digital and mobile culture to make educational outcomes more easily understood and actionable.

INTRODUCING THE CREDENTIAL INNOVATION FRAMEWORK

What does it mean to innovate academic credentials? If you think about the types of credentials that higher education issues, each has a role to play, aligned from highest level to the most detailed. Diplomas and non-degree certificates are mechanisms for verifying degree completion, and in many ways act as the learner currency most aligned with the labor market. While in some sense the transcript provides a deeper level of detail of what someone did to earn the degree, the reality is that the transcript has developed for a very particular purpose: to support transfer and graduate admissions or movement within or across schools and universities, where courses and credit hours are the lingua franca of student mobility. Recently, institutions have begun to think about ePortfolios not only as a formative learning technology but as a summative one, communicating evidence of learning.

While not perfect today, in many ways the transcript is the bridging document, providing deeper information about what someone accomplished and how well they accomplished it, while not overwhelming them with every little thing they ever did. However, the academic transcript, almost unchanged for decades, is not a complete inventory of the educative experience. As such, the traditional transcript is now beginning to evolve in both form and substance, from paper sent through the mail to electronic images or standardized data exchanged securely online and extended to document a lifetime of learning. We are at the beginning of seeing credentials really bring life to learner's online identities to help them get jobs and establish their professional identity.

Over the years, in product planning meetings, focus groups, surveys and at Parchment's annual user conference, we asked our members about extending the transcript and the future of credentialing. The result: our *Credential Innovation Framework (CIF)*, five clusters of innovative activities that institutions—like Furman University moving transcripts from paper to paperless, Stanford University with its clickable transcript, and the co-curricular transcript at Elon University—are performing as defined in the CIF to make their credentials more effective.

> There are 5 activity clusters within the CIF across the various degrees of credential innovation and the associated level of learner empowerment:



The CIF identifies five activity clusters arranged graphically based on how the degree of credential innovation on the X axis relates to the level of learner empowerment on the Y axis. Activities range from an eTranscript exchange with an institutional focus to more *learner-focused* activities that include an extended credential with added functionality, experiential and competency-based data, and sharable, actionable content. While presented as a continuum and somewhat interdependent, the clusters are best thought of as discrete. Here are the clusters in a nutshell:

1. *Go digital.* Begin with the eTranscript and expand to all credential types: diplomas, non-degree certificates, verifications and even digital diplomas.
2. *Do what paper can't.* Take the digital form beyond just an image of its paper counterpart with clickable, visual and machine-readable data for added functionality.
3. *Create new pathways.* Enhance credential exchange to support the diverse pathways learners take across institutions on their way to an academic degree, ensuring portability of courses and credits to maximize degree completion and learner success.
4. *Communicate more content.* Add competency-based and experiential, or co-curricular, data to show the full impact of a postsecondary education.

"Where you begin and end within the framework is based on your institutional mission..."

5. *Make it actionable.* Align with our digital and mobile culture, enabling learners to store credentials in one place where information can be easily displayed in online profiles, such as professional or social networking sites.

Where you begin and end within the framework is based on your institutional mission and depends on the degree of innovation that works for you today—and tomorrow. We offer you this catalyst for a new digital palette on which to innovate, a blueprint for a new era of credentialing that must start now. Because as our data show, it's what both registrars and learners want.

SURVEY SAYS!

To learn more about what registrars and learners are thinking and doing about the status quo, extending the transcript, sharing credentials and the future of credentialing, Parchment conducted two surveys: one for over 500 postsecondary graduates, the other for more than 100 registrars.

Of the registrars surveyed, only 41 percent said they are “somewhat to very likely” to offer a digital credential in the next 5 years. For learners, the survey reveals the type information or experiences they feel are “somewhat to very useful” to include in that digital credential: internships, student employment, academic performance, and academic undertakings. In addition, 46 percent of learners polled feel that the current transcript offered only “somewhat reflects the value of their education,” indicating that an expanded credential is needed.

THE FIRST CLUSTER: MAKING YOUR PAPER TRANSCRIPTS DIGITAL

The most prevalent activity in this cluster is taking your paper transcripts and making them digital, which is nothing new to academia. In fact, the first white paper about electronic transcripts was published by AACRAO/SPEEDE in 1997. After launching in 2004, it took Parchment until 2010 to process 1 million eTranscripts per year. Today, we process 1 million transcripts every 2 months.

eTRANSCRIPTS

By implementing Parchment eTranscripts, Furman University was able to decrease processing time from 4 to 6 hours daily to only 30 minutes, a savings of 87 percent. “Furman is far from leading edge when it comes to technology,” explains Brad Barron, associate dean and registrar at Furman University. “But we jumped right in as the wave started, and we’re prepared to ride it for a long time.”

Moving request and fulfillment from paper to digital provides more value than just cost savings. At Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Michael Rendon, university registrar used Parchment analytics, like order volume and PDFs versus paper, to understand results and benefits. “I’m a data nerd, so I want to be able to look at the data to parse and understand it,” says Rendon. “Parchment analytics lets you do just that, slicing and dicing the data in as many ways as you can think of. While we may know this information anecdotally, I now have the ability to look at the data and know for sure.”

eTranscripts are being adopted across South Carolina and nationwide. For The Citadel and others, security features, such as an authenticity statement and the direct download of PDFs from Parchment, bring peace of mind for both senders and receivers. Today, paper transcripts are a thing of the past at The Citadel. “Our customers are extremely pleased with the online service, and we believe a satisfied customer is a well-served customer,” says Registrar Sylvia Nesmith. “Excellent service is what we strive for, so Parchment has greatly contributed to this endeavor.”

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*-Michael Rendon, Registrar
Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi*

Indiana University of Pennsylvania offers its students various levels of service for ordering transcripts, including the option of requesting eTranscripts with Parchment. According to Jeannie Brosky, associate registrar for student records, numbers show that students who were getting free paper transcripts are willing to spend a few dollars for the ease of going online, whether they live two blocks away or across the globe. “Students are buying convenience with electronic transcripts,” she says.

AND BEYOND

Transcripts are just one type of academic credential, when all are about to go digital: diplomas, non-degree certificates and verifications. Today, we are in the early days of digital diplomas, with certificates sure to follow. A 2012 Census Bureau report revealed that more than 19 million, or 9 percent of U.S. adults held an educational certificate apart from an academic degree. This includes 4.5 million who were high school graduates and 4 million with a bachelor’s degree.

"In this report, we've been able to measure for the first time how many people take another route to a productive career: holding an alternative educational credential independent of traditional college degrees. It turns out that millions of people have taken this path," explains demographer Stephanie Ewert.

A Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report, also published in 2012, said that "while certificates currently aren't counted in many measures of postsecondary attainment, often they provide the outcomes that degree-seeking students are looking for gainful employment." Today, that trend continues. Despite rapidly growing enrollments in continuing and executive education programs, non-degree certificates are often printed and handed out on the last day by local departments, with no ability to track them online.

Institutions who conquer the first cluster not only issue their transcripts digitally but also all their market-value credentials.

THE SECOND CLUSTER: USING DIGITAL CONTENT TO DO THINGS PAPER CAN'T

"We need to take what now exists as a dumb, static document and turn it into a richer, updateable, more connected record of a person's skills, expertise and experience," says LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman. "And then we need to take that record and make it part of a fully networked certification platform."

Just like a movie is more than filming a play, transforming the transcript is more than taking a picture of something that was paper. The next cluster of activities is about taking advantage of that digital form to do things paper credentials can't do and includes:

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- Making your transcript clickable to access course descriptions or connecting a diploma to an ePortfolio to see evidence of learning
- Presenting content in dynamic and visual ways, like a competency versus a courses-taken view, a timeline of achievement, or a pie chart of subject matter
- Issuing credential sets tied to the credential account

- Providing machine-readable data for communicating the two-page transcript in a more efficient way as well additional information that employers and admissions offices can filter using their enterprise systems

Case in point: Stanford University, which offers a clickable digital transcript. Receiving the transcript in electronic format, the reader can click on any course listed and go right into the catalog description of the course. Clicking further leads to the syllabus. From the student perspective, clicking even further leads to an ePortfolio and, depending on the program and what the student has done, shows actual evidence of the learning inside that classroom.

Stanford University Registrar Thomas Black, who pioneered the use of embedded links, explains. “I’m a record keeper... I’m supposed to capture the academic record, your experience at Stanford,” he says. “That’s my job, to capture the whole breadth of that—not to get it distilled, but to capture it accurately... we can be more descriptive about these things and reference them as well.”

As far back as 2009, Black also foresaw digital transcripts that convey the entire student experience. “You say, well, there are probably some activities that students engage in, particularly honors activities or major service projects that are not reflected on the transcript but ought to be. So we can be more descriptive about these things and reference them as well,” he says.

Arizona State University (ASU) is working with a number of community colleges so that students, while they’re still at their home base of the two year institution, can have their transcript data sent to ASU and put through a degree-audit program to make sure that the courses they’re taking are going to maximize their transfer and completion on time to that four year degree. This requires an institution to institution exchange of machine-readable data around courses, grades, and similar information. To print and mail that information and then open, scan and index it would be absolutely unscalable.

In Colorado, a statewide Reverse Transfer Program is the direct opposite: the ability for students to leave the two year program without having an associate’s degree. In their four year program, on the way to a bachelor’s degree, if they earn enough credits to get that two year degree, they will earn an “associate’s in passing,” which means that even if they don’t ultimately complete the four year program, they will still have that foundation of a two year credential. This requires institution to institution collaboration and exchange of student records and student performance information via machine-readable data.

Those mastering the second cluster are using clickable transcripts, visual content, machine-readable data and credential accounts to do exactly what Reid Hoffman suggests in his discussion of certification as a platform.

He believes that “with certification as a platform, not just a product, the feedback loops between all parties will tighten, enabling education providers to track what employers are looking for, students to have more explicit guideposts to help them transition more successfully into the workforce, and employers to use certification as a finding mechanism, not just a screening mechanism.”

THE THIRD CLUSTER: CREATING NEW PATHWAYS THROUGH CREDENTIAL EXCHANGE

According to the National Student Clearinghouse, Research Center, one-third of all students change institutions at some point in their academic life, with 25 percent of those transferring more than once. And there are emerging education options as well, such as MOOCs and badges. As student pathways for higher education change and evolve, so must the pathways for sharing digital content between institutions, creating a portable online credential history that allows learners to make the most of what they have acquired on their educational path.

Arizona State University (ASU) is partnering with Parchment to work with a number of community colleges so that students, while they're still at their home base of the two year institution, can have their transcript data sent to ASU and put through a degree-audit program to make sure that the courses they're taking are going to maximize their transfer and completion on time to that four year degree. This requires an institution to institution exchange of machine-readable data around courses, grades, and similar information. To print and mail that information and then open, scan and index it would be absolutely unscalable. The process for both sending and receiving institutions is fast and easy with Parchment.

In Colorado, a statewide Reverse Transfer Program, one of the first in the country, is the direct opposite: the ability for students to leave the two year program without having an associate's degree. In their four year program, on the way to a bachelor's degree, if students earn enough credits to get that two year degree, they will earn an “associate's in passing,” which means that even if they don't ultimately complete the four year program, they will still have that foundation of a two year credential. With Parchment, the institutions can easily collaborate and exchange of student records and student performance information in machine-readable format.

With the activities in this third cluster, institutions are helping students maximize the value of their credits and courses to decrease time to completion and increase graduation rates.

THE FOURTH CLUSTER: INNOVATING WHAT YOU ARE COMMUNICATING

Today's postsecondary students are learning in more ways than ever before, challenging academic administrators to document a more complete educative experience.

To meet this need, forward-thinking colleges and universities are beginning to communicate the leadership experiences and competency achievements, along with the academic accomplishments resulting from their programs.

Now your transcript is digital, and the digital medium has made it more effective and functional. The next set of activities enables us to innovate what we are communicating in that digital transcript. Documenting experiential (co-curricular) and competency-based learning shows the complete educative experience: campus life, service learning, study abroad, internships, research projects and more. Students live much of their lives online, where they are establishing professional identities and getting jobs. A number of initiatives in the higher education community have successfully generated some momentum and adoption for extending the transcript and putting it online.

One example is Elon University's electronic experiential transcript that documents student participation in leadership development, service learning, internships, study abroad and undergraduate research programs. The university has offered its Elon Experiences Co-Curricular Transcript (CCT) since 1994. In 2013, Elon became the first college to tie together the electronically released co-curricular transcript with the academic transcript. "Students should not have to go multiple places to obtain documents that paint a full picture of their academic experience, and the secondary transcript gives us the ability to record more detailed information regarding the signature experiences of studying at Elon," Registrar Rodney Parks explains.

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To address these concerns and encourage the exchange of experiential information, Elon partnered with Parchment to bridge the gap between the CCT and the academic transcript. The university worked with Parchment to modify the transcript ordering system to allow students to opt-in to receive a copy of their CCT along with their traditional academic transcript. With the new ordering system in place, Elon saw orders for CCT transcripts increase from just 3 to more than 700 in the first year the technology went online.

Elon University also integrated the CCT and academic transcripts into one certified PDF, revising both transcripts to have a similar look and feel, with appropriate legends on the back of each transcript (second page of the PDF). Similarly, Elon needed to differentiate the two transcripts to provide clarity to receivers. To do this, they elected to use different colored transcript paper for each of the two transcripts, academic in maroon and experiences in gold.

Upon surveying the employer or postsecondary school recipients of these transcripts, the university found that 40 percent of respondents view candidates with an experiential transcript more favorably, while 36 percent said an experiential transcript improves an applicant's chance of employment or admissions. A majority also believes that receiving the information was helpful to the hiring or admissions process and was used in making a hiring or admissions decision.

To document their achievements at the University of Pittsburgh, learners participate in the nationally-recognized RealWorld Action Program, which emphasizes campus, community and global engagement. The program recognizes the development of key attributes—leadership, involvement, service and teamwork—that complement their academic studies. Students receive a co-curricular transcript that enables them to confidently articulate their out-of-class experiences to prospective employers and graduate schools, demonstrating that they have become well-rounded and marketable.

Northern Arizona University (NAU) produces a competency report that defines specific competencies and what it means for students to master them. For example, for a Liberal Arts major, competencies to master include working in a team structure, working with diverse populations and analyzing complicated materials. What's more, like our utility bills and bank statements, competency reports can include more graphical content, like bar graphs and pie charts, transforming a dry inventory of data to a more informative visual presentation.

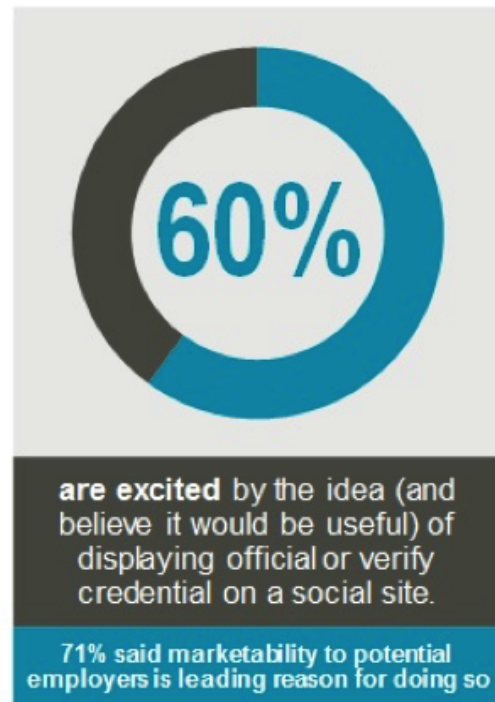
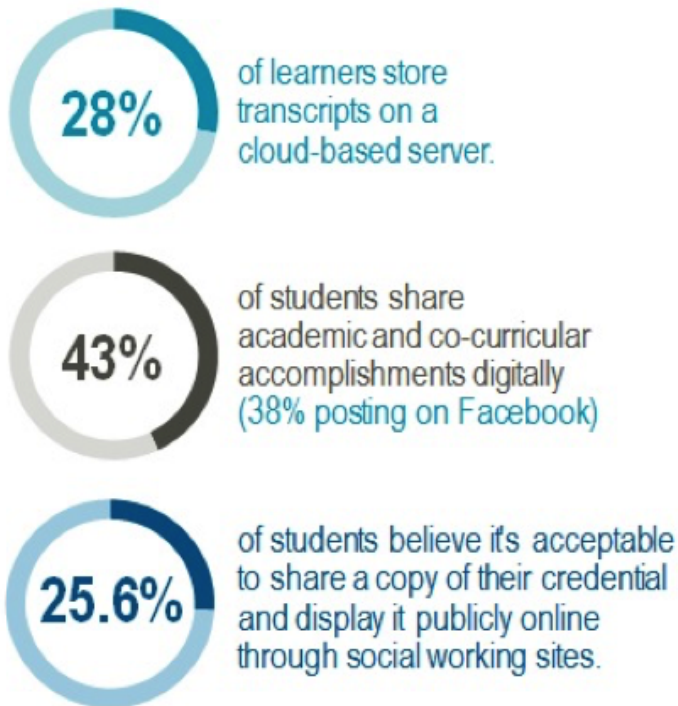
Elon University, The University of Pittsburgh, NAU and others who master this third cluster are documenting the complete educative experience, articulating the value of postsecondary learning for employers and admissions offices.

THE FIFTH CLUSTER: MAKING CREDENTIALS TRULY ACTIONABLE FOR THE LEARNER

According to Kevin Carey in the aforementioned *New York Times* article, open credentialing systems allow people to control information about themselves— what they learned in college and what they learned everywhere else—and present that data directly to employers. “In a world where people increasingly interact over distances, electronically, the ability to control your online educational identity is crucial,” says Carey.

Thus, the activities in the fifth cluster are all about rethinking the traditional barriers to what we can do with credentials, including storing credentials in one place, online, where they can be easily shared. Today, every university fills up a database with degree completion information that is verifiable. Online profiles are where learners today are establishing their professional identity. Why not just give graduates secure electronic diploma, so when employers sees it they know it's true and valid?

More than 550 recent college graduates told Parchment:



Additional results from the Parchment survey show that 78 percent of registrars think that students sharing their digital credentials is inevitable. So it's not surprising that safety and security are key concerns, along with fraud and transcript alteration. "Students will post this without giving a thought to identity theft," shared one registrar.

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Further, 28 percent of learners said they already store scanned or digital transcripts on a cloud-based server (like Google Drive, iCloud, and OneDrive). In addition, 43 percent of students have shared information about academic and co-curricular accomplishments on LinkedIn, with 38 percent posting the same on Facebook. And 26 percent of students believe it's acceptable to share a copy of their credential and display it publically online through social networking sites.

While students may be sharing unofficial transcript information today, 60 percent are excited by idea of displaying official or verified credential on a digital or social site, while 62 percent believe would be useful. And 71 percent said marketability to potential employers is leading reason for doing so. The takeaway: Students are going to share their credentials, online and socially, doing what they have to do to be marketable. But they want to do so with the institution's seal of approval.

Conquering the fifth cluster enables registrars, concerned with student safety and data security, meet their students' need for digital credentials.

REDEFINING THE eTRANSCRIPT WITH PARCHMENT

Before the CIF became an innovation framework for institutions, it began as the blueprint for our product roadmap and a way to realize our mission to empower the learner. We've built the Parchment platform to provide a range of services that allows institutions to do what they want to do with the flexibility to expand and grow. Today, we are partnering with innovative institutions and registrars, taking orders for and delivering extended credentials and working to build these extensions right into our core service.

However, we do understand that not every institution is ready to do everything all at once. This philosophy is reflected in the significant upgrades of our upcoming launch of Parchment 7. With this release, we are furthering our transformation from an eTranscript exchange service to a credential management system. We know that it's about more than transcripts and making academic credentials digital. Similar to the instructional side, where the course management system morphed into a learning management system, we've created a new category with credential management. With the leadership of innovative institutions across the country, eTranscript management is evolving into credential management.

THE BOTTOM LINE: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE LEARNER

By extending the traditional academic credential beyond courses, grades and credits to show the full impact of a postsecondary education, your college or university can give your students what they need and their potential employers what they want. With the Credential Innovation Framework as their guide, institutions are moving from paper academic diplomas to extended digital credentials stored in one place—online—where they can be easily displayed. So learners can quickly show what they know and discover education and career opportunities that put their credentials to work. And employers can get information to make informed decisions about job candidates.

Giving students the ability to take their higher education credentials and combine them with other types of credentials over their lifetime is a way to both promote your institution and enable students to make the most of the education that they've earned there. Sharing their diplomas or certificates online is amazing social validation for your college or university that raises awareness and drives more interest back to the home institution. And most importantly, your learners are empowered, more marketable and ultimately more successful.