

# Credentials

UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEMS.  
IDENTIFY THE OPPORTUNITIES.  
CREATE THE SOLUTIONS.

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FOREWORD BY PETER EWELL



Understand  
the problems.



Identify the  
opportunities.



Create the  
solutions.

# PART ONE

## The Promise and the Problem

1 The Purposes of  
Credentials: How  
They Work

2 The Promise of  
Abundance: An  
Opportune  
Environment

3 The Problems of  
Proliferation: A  
Risky Environment

# PART TWO: Degrees of Difference

4 The Associate's Degree

5 The Bachelor's Degree

6 The Master's Degree

7 The Doctorate

# PART TWO: Degrees of Difference

8 Nondegree Credentials:  
Certificates

9 Nondegree Credentials:  
Certifications and Other Options

10 Apprenticeships: A Special Case

# PART THREE: Implications for Action

11 Quality and  
Equity in the  
Credentials  
Marketplace

12 Academic  
Leadership at a  
Critical Time

Credentials as  
transactional

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Human capital – vouchers for  
skills

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Signaling, screening –  
suggesting intangibles

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Sources of status and power –  
conflict theory

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Creators of social roles –  
institutional theory

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Credentials in contexts – labor  
market, organization

# Multiple dimensions of complexity

More kinds of credentials



More credential sequences



More providers, more kinds of providers



More delivery approaches

# Changing credential environment

Challenge of navigating the complexity of options

Increasing marketplace competition

More students interested in credentials, more low-income students

Economic motivations, concerns about cost, employer interests



# Tracks converge

## THEN

- “Transfer” degrees (AA, AS) are for students who intend to apply their credits to baccalaureate programs.
- “Applied” degrees (AAS, AAB) are for students who will use their degrees to seek employment.

## NOW

- Many more recipients of “transfer associate degrees” now seek immediate employment
- Many more recipients of “applied associate degrees” now seek to apply transfer credit to baccalaureate programs

Problem: Although 80% of community college students hope to earn a bachelor's degree, only 13% do so. Solutions?

1

Transfer pathways between CCs and liberal-arts colleges.

2

CCs *within* colleges and universities.

3

University service centers within community colleges.

# The Master's Degree: Identity Crisis?

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Interim credential for an aspiring doctoral student

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Terminal credential for graduate student

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Basis for promotion, tenure, raise for K-12 teacher

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Qualification for professional practice in library science, social work, speech pathology, etc.

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Enables differentiation between artists (MFA) and scholars (MA)

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Qualification to teach at a community college

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A platform for corporate success (MBA)

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Former practitioner credential in physical therapy, audiology, pharmacy, etc.

# Multiple roles of non-degree credentials

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Adding value to traditional degrees

Pivot points for those employed

Safety nets as entrée to careers

# Certificates

For-credit: variety, multiple purposes, pathways, field specific, economical

Noncredit: wide variation, lack of data

New types: career certificates (e.g. Google), bootcamps

Value may depend on institution, location, length

# Other non-degree credentials

Certifications: access to career, occupation or advancement; direct and indirect pathways

Licensure: legal occupational practice; state by state; evolving over time

Badges: motivate, validate learning; inconsistent quality

# A problem of scale

In Germany and Switzerland, apprenticeship programs prepare 50%+ of college-age students for employment

In the US, only 2% of those preparing for employment do so through internships

# Apprenticeships: New paradigm

## “CLASSIC”

- Plumbing
- Electrical engineering
- Bricklaying
- Printing (Benjamin Franklin)
- Surveying (George Washington)

## “CONTEMPORARY”

- Insurance
- Graphic arts
- Cybersecurity
- Banking and finance
- Marketing

# Credentials and the class divide

Financial and social advancement – but also exclusion and estrangement

Concerns about overreliance on credentials for picking winners and losers

# Quality and equity

Quality and equity should go hand in hand

Inequities in completion, debt

Several current efforts to promote quality and equity

Quality Credentials Task Force recommends:

- Institutional actions
- State and national actions

Your . . .



Comments



Questions



Suggestions

Thank you!

