Using Digital Badges to Assess College Readiness

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What *is* a digital badge?

- A record of learning or accomplishment
- Provides greater context than grades, GPAs, or standardized test scores
- Can be organized to represent paths, complex accomplishments
- Can be re-presented by learners for various purposes (like portfolios)
- Meta-data is key to their power
Anatomy of a digital badge

- Badge name
- Description
- Criteria
- Issuer
- Evidence
- Date issued
- Expiration
- Standards
- Tags

Vocabulary note: Digital badges = micro-credentials. (Your mileage may vary!)
Why badges for college?

- Expanding access to higher education
  - Recruit learners who have great potential, but have not been successful by traditional measures

- Expanding success in higher education
  - Use badges to reshape the way we guide and mark student progress in higher ed, creating a more complete and transparent record for future use
  - Badges can be a key component of mastery-based assessment and student-tracking systems
We held a workshop...

Our challenge to workshop participants:

● To envision “new cultural practices” or infrastructures in support of college admissions — powered by digital micro-credentials — that can increase access to and success in college for diverse learners

● To identify challenges and opportunities for further research and design(s) to realize the vision(s)
Driving questions

- Can micro-credentials serve as valid and reliable measures of prior learning and future potential?
- What “gap” in current admissions practices can be filled by micro-credentials?
- What is required for micro-credentials to be useful for college admission?
It takes a village...

Admissions Officers (Consumers)
Badge Awarding Organizations (Producers)
Assessment Experts (Endorsers)

University Administrators (Endorsers)
University Faculty (Consumers)
Technology Providers (Supporters)
How do colleges “do” admissions?

- Holistic review with multiple rounds
- Focus on “potential for success”
- Goal is to develop diversity within pool of applications & admits
- Determine “authenticity” of student interest and experience
- Scale is an ongoing challenge
- Colleges are in competition with each other in unexpected ways
Admissions challenges

- Undermatch
- Lack of student awareness of financial aid options
- Overburdened or poorly informed high school advising
- Legal challenges to diversity initiatives; must avoid bias
- Problems with standardized tests; mostly they measure SES
- Challenges with interpreting GPA across schools
- Much more validated information about “formal” than “informal” student learning
- How to preserve student agency in the process? How to avoid “arms races”?
Examples at the workshop

- **Mouse**: National youth development nonprofit focused on coding and computational thinking
  - Empower all students to create with technology to solve real problems and make meaningful change in our world
  - Partnership with Parsons New School for Design to validate badge pathways for use in college admission and credit/placement

- **Chicago City of Learning**: A learning ecosystem/network
  - Supports young people to explore and uncover resources across an entire city and find out what they can learn, make, do, and ultimately become; creates potential for data-driven guidance
  - Focus on social justice, access to resources, and positive growth
Major issues identified for badges in admissions

- Equity - design to expand access to educational opportunities
- Validity - lies with credibility of badge source & endorsement
- Agency - promote learning, not earning
- Lifelong learning - persistent, interoperable, secure, portable
- Infrastructure - technical & policy issues
- Scalability - context vs. uniformity
Equity

- Will badges provide opportunities to showcase non-traditional learning?
- Will use of badges stigmatize applicants?
- Will badges provide new opportunity, or just a new “arms race”?

Validity and Endorsement

- How will admissions officers interpret the meaning of badges?
- How should badges from different issuers be compared/contrasted?
- “Systems” exist for GPA and SAT/ACT… what about badges?
Agency and Authenticity

• Sustained focus indicates authentic engagement
• How can digital badges promote student agency and authentic paths?
• How can digital badges help students communicate this to admissions?

Promoting Lifelong Learning

• Will badges allow for continuity from H.S. to college and beyond?
• If learners thrived in non-traditional environments in high school, can we evolve the college learning environment to better support them?
Need for Infrastructure

- IMS Global is leading a standards-setting process
- Two leading platforms recently merged… is consolidation a risk?
- How to preserve data privacy, ownership, and access?

Scalability

- What are the implications if badge use in admissions remains “niche”?
- How can we move to scale without recreating challenges around equity, validity, and authenticity that exist in the current system?
Change and progress in college admissions (and college itself) is possible… but only through coordinated innovation and effort.

Our students depend on it.
Read the entire report!

https://tinyurl.com/badges-admissions

Thank you.