

Chapter 20

Capturing Student Achievement and Learning Pathways at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County: Digital Badging and the Comprehensive Learner Record

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ABSTRACT

In 2015, the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) recognized the need to capture knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired by students in both co-curricular and curricular endeavors not being captured in any identifiable way. The Vice President of Information Technology and Chief Information Officer desired to document competencies gained by students in the variety of contexts on campus and to track student, faculty, and staff achievements in a way that would both benefit each individual while also supporting the mission of the institution. This vision led to the adoption of a digital badging initiative resulting in a scalable process for implementing new badges throughout the university community. UMBC's digital badging program became the springboard for the institution's entrance into the Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR) realm whose objective is to capture all credentials earned by students, whether they be awarded before, during, or following their tenure at the institution.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, the college degree has been the standard by which potential employers ranked candidates applying for jobs. Earning an associate, bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degree has been the criteria that signaled appropriate levels of employability for new hires (Selingo, 2017). Traditional methods of student record keeping such as transcripts provide a limited scope of what students actually did during their time in school and are considered binary in nature (pass/fail, letter grades, etc.) (Matkin, 2017). Additionally, degree and college curricula evolve at an extremely slow pace, much slower than what the digital economy requires, and employers often have difficulty ensuring that these graduates have the skills necessary to succeed in the workplace (Selingo, 2017). Furthermore, traditional course grades only recognize the overall level of achievement of a course's stated objectives and not individual competencies gained during the class; therefore, competencies achieved outside of this defined and established traditional credentialing structure were not documented in a referenceable way for the learner. Many of the competencies being achieved in other activities on campus not only contribute to the development of participants cognitively, socially, and emotionally, but they also prepare them to enter the workforce upon completion of their education. This includes active memberships in student organizations, clubs, service-learning opportunities, and work experiences, to name a few (Parks & Taylor, 2016). Specific knowledge, skills, and abilities gained both in and out of the classroom are key to student success post-graduation. Alternative credentials, such as digital badges, have provided a mechanism to recognize skill acquisition with greater granularity and transparency than the traditional transcript can offer and a meaningful opportunity to document competencies gained in co-curricular spaces.

BACKGROUND

In 2015, the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), one of 12 institutions in the University System of Maryland (USM), recognized the need to capture knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired by students in both co-curricular and curricular endeavors that were not being captured in any identifiable way. The Vice President of Information Technology and Chief Information Officer, Jack Suess, originally referred to this effort as "Tracking Activities and Guiding Success (myTAGS)." Here's how Mr. Suess described the effort,

The goal of this project is to broadly use digital credentials, sometimes referred to as badges, as a mechanism for tracking student, staff, and faculty activities and achievements... We are referring to these digital credentials as TAGS – short for tracking achievements & guiding success. By following the emerging standards and best practices for digital credentials, we will have metadata associated with these tags that will be utilized in a variety of different ways to support UMBC's mission.

Some of the expected benefits from this initiative were as follows:

- Building a badging infrastructure that is tied into LinkedIn, UMBC could follow how students progress after graduation. In particular, a specific goal is creating the ability to identify learning experiences that make a difference in future career success;

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