

## Chapter 4

# A Guide to Innovation in the Adoption of Alternative Digital Credentials

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter provides a guidance to universities that desire to adopt quality standards and effective procedures for the issuance of alternative digital credentials (ADCs). Its underlying message is that universities must become involved in issuing ADCs if they are to continue to serve the public in relevant ways. It lists the strong reasons for the institutional adoption of ADCs, the barriers to adoption, and then provides advice on how to design an institutional icon (badge), criteria for the issuance of ADCs, the standardization of ADC metadata, choosing an ADC platform, establishing governance and oversight, and establishing an administrative structure. This chapter argues strongly for the adoption of competency-based assessments in contrast to assessments focused only on learning achievement assessments. This comprehensive guide is based on the experience of three universities which have successfully implemented comprehensive ADC issuance programs.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter identifies the steps that higher education institutions should take to adopt Alternative Digital Credentials (ADCs) in their most innovative and useful form. It provides examples of organizational structures that universities are employing to

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create and issue ADCs. In addition, it describes the reasons for, and barriers to, the responsible administration of ADCs.

ADCs were introduced at least a decade ago and universities have accumulated enough experience to identify patterns of use and misuse of ADCs. Yet, many universities have not fully established an ADC system. Therefore, a guide is presented here to help institutions develop a plan.

This chapter draws on the experience of three universities that have recently prepared an institutional-wide set of policies and procedures for creating and issuing ADCs. These universities include: The University of California, Irvine (UCI), the University of Buffalo in the SUNY system (UB), and George Mason University (GM). The commonalities and contrasts in the approaches of these three universities provide a basis to generalize the experience to other universities. The reference section contains the websites of each of these universities that have informed the substance of this article.

Rising above the many examples of the types of ADCs issued by these and other universities, this chapter focuses on the workplace-relevant, competency-based “skill” ADCs as the primary innovation introduced by the underlying technology that makes ADCs possible. The primacy of this type of ADC will be explained and defended.

## **MAKING THE INSTITUTIONAL CASE**

Universities wishing to adopt ADCs will first have to make a strong institutional case. What is pushing universities to adopt ADCs? How can university leaders effectively advocate for ADCs?

The answers to these questions form an imperative for higher education—a case so strong that ignoring ADCs will imperil the underlying contract that universities have struck with society—to serve as a launching pad for students to establish careers and experience lifetime enrichment.

Universities that ignore ADCs will miss an opportunity to provide greater service at a relatively low cost, but also will forego a competitive advantage in the increasingly troubled marketplace for students. In January 2019, the International Council for Open and Distance Education, (ICDE), issued a report, “The Present and Future of Alternative Digital Credentials,” that documents the primary reasons for the adoption of ADCs by institutions (Matkin, G. et al., 2010).

## **ADCs Are Already Widely Offered**

The ICDE report indicates that this rationale has increased in prominence. Many universities are issuing ADCs, including Arizona State University, Southern New

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