

# The Successful Registrar

Managing Records,  
Systems, and Staff

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## SNAPSHOTS

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FERPA Doc® Richard Rainsberger explains the interplay between legitimate educational interest and the health and safety emergency exception. **Page 3**

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## Tools of the Trade

### It's time to consider the benefits of Credential Engine

By Alexander Taylor, Jesse Parrish, and Rodney Parks, Ph.D.

To increase the transparency and utility of the higher education ecosystem, registrars should support the adoption of a universal credential registry. By connecting information about credentials and their value, Credential Engine's registry creates for students an ever-expanding atlas of educational possibilities.

From 2010 to 2018, the higher education ecosystem has seen a rapid expansion in the number and types of credentials that learners can attain. This growth is enabled by disruptive technologies like virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and asynchronous collaboration platforms. These technologies democratize access to learning pathways with the power of the internet, but they also create uncertainty with regard to credential taxonomy, validity, and relevance. A report by Credential Engine found that the United States alone has approximately 300,000 unique credentials offered by education providers that range from traditional colleges and universities to massive

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## Policies & Procedures

### Serve your students better by moving to centralized scheduling

By Halley Sutton, Assistant Editor

NASHVILLE — Is scheduling classes and classrooms an easy-to-manage function on your campus? If not, moving to a centralized scheduling model could restore order to your campus, while ensuring students can access the courses they need to complete their degree.

But doing so isn't without challenges, as Whitney Brand, academic scheduler; and David Jenks, Ph.D., associate vice president for academic affairs, both from the University of West Georgia, demonstrated during a session on

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open online courses and online boot camps. While the proliferation of pathways poses enormous potential for learners of all types, innovation in higher education is currently outpacing the development of essential credential frameworks.

Over the last decade, the number of learners has increased as well. A large swath of the formerly “nontraditional” student population is entering or re-entering the higher education ecosystem. Aging learners are pursuing postsecondary education to acquire skills relevant to the information age and improve their economic mobility. Learners age 25 or older now constitute about 27 percent of the undergraduate population, according to *The Adult Student: The Population Colleges — and the Nation — Can’t Afford to Ignore*, a report by Goldie Blumenstyk published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Disruptive innovations in higher education are not only increasing the number of learners, but their variety as well. The lower relative cost of online or technology-enabled learning increases accessibility, visibility, and affordability. While many of these learners have prior work or learning experience that may qualify for college credit, many still encounter challenges when trying to earn credit for it.

Modern colleges and universities are steadily adopting practices that inform the evaluation of credits from these noninstitutional sources. A notable example is the American Council of Education’s work to standardize prior learning, with specific attention given to knowledge and skills gained during military service. Guided by ACE’s recommendations, a number of institutions now

have common articulation agreements for the assignment of credit for learning that takes place in the military. Other noninstitutional learning pathways have inspired partnerships between postsecondary education providers and employers. In 2017, Northeastern University and IBM developed an agreement that grants holders of IBM digital badges credit toward three of Northeastern’s master’s-level programs. These solutions, initially conceived to accommodate the nontraditional learner, are seeing widespread adoption as institutions aspire to serve all learners.

In the future, these solutions will likely take the form of credential frameworks, deployed in accordance with universal interoperability standards that facilitate the use and interpretation of credentials regardless of their issuer or their owner. Credentials will no longer be issued in paper; they will instead be organized as HTML and accessible through JSON-LD and machine-readable code. In the borderless realm of the internet, these digital credentials will populate comprehensive, interactive databases by which learners can search for and compare corresponding learning pathways.

Future learners and education providers will soon participate in a transparent and empirical credentialing ecosystem. This ecosystem will promote accessibility — all credentials can be viewed unabridged by any party; equity — learners and providers share credentials on a level playing field; quality assurance — information is validated by a single trusted party or no party (such as by a distributed ledger); and responsiveness — the credential ecosystem is representative of the needs and patterns of the market.

The field of higher education will be an open ecosystem in which information about various credentials will be transparent and accessible to learners and education providers. Based on the foundation of a common language, such as the Credential Transparency Description Language, stakeholders will benefit from a shared expectation of the value of a credential and its associated outcomes. Using these outcomes, credential issuers and users will be able to pinpoint a learner’s level of competency in a given discipline. Today, competency-based education is considered an alternative to the prevailing mode of credit-based learning. However, credential users will evaluate credentials not by the ambiguous metric of the credit hour, but instead by discrete learning outcomes and competencies.

To increase the transparency and utility of the credentialing marketplace, registrars should promote

### What is Credential Engine?

Credential Engine is a nonprofit organization seeking to improve transparency in the credentialing marketplace. Its cloud-based repository, the Credential Registry, hopes to be a centralized database for education providers to register and compare credentials found across all sectors and education types. Using the Credential Transparency Description Language, diverse and varied credential information is standardized and can be compared based on cost, learning outcomes, and application in the workforce.

For more information on Credential Engine, go to <https://credentialengine.org/>.

To get involved and register with Credential Engine, go to <https://credentialengine.org/accounts/>. ■

and support the adoption of the Credential Engine Registry among colleges, universities, and other accredited credential issuers. Institutions of all types should publish their existing credentials and their component learning outcomes, competencies, and related information to the registry. These entries are complemented, when applicable, by transfer articulation agreements and school of record agreements. At most institutions, this information currently exists in isolation, limiting its utility and accessibility. Once uploaded to a common registry and aligned to the CTDL, it becomes part of an ever-expanding atlas of educational possibilities.

When these data are posted in the CTDL format, students can view how credentials and credits connect to others regardless of their source. One immediate and foreseeable impact of this system is on institutional transfer. Today, an estimated 38 percent of postsecondary students will transfer to another institution within six years of the date of first matriculation (*learn more from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center's Transfer and mobility: A national view of student movement in postsecondary institutions, Fall 2011 Cohort (Signature Report No. 15)* at <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Signature-Report-15.pdf>). Scaled adoption of the CE Registry could provide transparency to what is currently an opaque, resource-intensive, and highly institutional process. Articulation agreements can be built into the open repository where users could view how their credentials are articulated by education providers. Institutions can also utilize this system by creating advanced standing pathways and articulation agreements for recruitment.

While the CE Registry clearly benefits the student, its use also has significant implications for education professionals, such as registrars and admissions officers. Data from the registry has the capacity to help institutions develop enrollment management strategies to promote regional economic development and institution-employer partnerships. This in turn can help align employer expectations for local graduates and learning outcomes and competencies offered by education providers. This system also improves the credential appraisal process that

employers rely on to acquire talented and work-ready graduates. Today, there is poor signaling to employers about graduates' readiness in the workforce. The CE Registry would illuminate learning outcomes and signals to employers about what graduates attain once receiving a credential. This post-traditional credential system empowers learners to curate and share what their experiences, skills, interests, and learning goals are, as opposed to only submitting standard admission packages.

A transparent credential system like the CE Registry serves the ideal of universal accessibility. However, a manual repository opens the door to unintended consequences if not maintained and implemented correctly. Higher education is notoriously slow to adapt to market demands for skills and competencies, and affording employers greater influence over the perceived value and relevance of corresponding credentials may erode the authority and prestige of the academy. There is also the considerable challenge of persuading suppliers and consumers to buy into the system's legitimacy as a reliable source of evidence. Agents resistant to change will avoid investment in an open credentialing marketplace, as it is against their long-standing tradition of credential evaluation. However, as the credentialing marketplace becomes more diverse and complex, an open credentialing marketplace may be seen as a welcome interpretive structure. ■

### About the authors

Alexander Taylor is assistant registrar at Elon University, where he has served since 2017. He has published articles on numerous topics, including dual enrollment, alternative credentialing, and strategic enrollment initiatives, among others.

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### Get published in *The Successful Registrar*

For *The Successful Registrar* writers' guidelines, please contact the editor, Joan Hope, at [jhope@wiley.com](mailto:jhope@wiley.com). ■