



EXECUTIVE BULLETED RESEARCH BRIEF (EBRB) STACKABLE CREDENTIALS FEBRUARY 2017

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1.

WHAT IS A STACKABLE CREDENTIAL?

- A way to recognize incremental completion via credentials for certain skills or levels of a full certification program
- As the name implies, these credentials signify competency in discrete skill or knowledge areas within the full “stack” of credentials that comprise a whole certification
- The “stacking” of credentials allows for a certification program to break up its full scope of training into sections or levels – credentials higher in the “stack” represent more complex knowledge that builds on credentials lower in the “stack”

2.

HOW IS A STACKABLE CREDENTIAL USED?

- Utilizing stacked credentials can help professionals to grow their career in a more accessible way or earn more for their skills
- Employers can look to employees’ stacked credentials when deciding how to train, place, or promote
- Currently, stackable credentials are most often offered via colleges/universities; not much information on professional organizations that are implementing stackable credentials

3.

HOW IS A STACKABLE CREDENTIAL DEVELOPED?

The most commonly cited way is to base each stackable credential on competencies that are utilized for specific job roles

4.

EXECUTIVE BULLETED RESEARCH FINDINGS

<https://evollution.com/opinions/remember-building-stackable-credentials/>

- “There is not yet strong evidence that stackable credentials increase student earning potential or chances for completion. However, there are reasons to be hopeful. A [recent study](#) by the Census Bureau found that people with certifications and licenses **earn more** than those without those credentials. Additional [research](#) on student progression and completion has shown that awards can help **build momentum towards completion.**”
- Recent [research has shown](#) that, while there is a lot of variation across states and field of study, **many short-term certificates lack labor market returns.** These certificates can become an “accounting gimmick” to make it seem like the system is producing more credentials with no substantive change. And **with no formal guidance the pathways can also be even more confusing** for students who don’t understand the sequencing.”
- “Include intrusive advising: While stackable credentials are meant to be intuitive for students, this is not always the case. **Institutions need to ensure that students are aware of the opportunities and benefits of additional education** along the pathway.”



While there are benefits to earning certifications, creating stackable credentials presents the challenges of how to add value to each incremental step and how to advise stackable credential earners.

<http://www.usnews.com/education/online-education/articles/2016-04-12/stackable-credential-options-rise-in-online-education>

- “Stackable credential is particularly suitable for [non-traditional students](#) **balancing their education with other** responsibilities like full-time jobs.”
- “Employers are showing trends of [paying more attention](#) to those levels of education and completion,”



Stackable credentials can be beneficial to both students and employers

<http://crl.acrl.org/content/early/2015/05/11/crl15-712.full.pdf+html>

- “In one [recent survey](#) of 114 human resources managers across various industries, only 5 percent said they weren't interested in digital badges at all... **Sixty-two percent of the respondents said they were interested in badges but also needed to learn more** about them.”
- “Ability to demonstrate **extra learning beyond the classroom**”: employers rated this ability as 4.60 out of 5.00 (very important)
- “Most significant result from this test is that the ability to demonstrate extra learning beyond the classroom was grouped with college courses as the most important collegiate experiences. This indicates there is **value to students for earning digital badges beyond their college courses**”

Takeaway: Current trends point to the value of credentials, although more research must be done on how stackable credentials will add value beyond a full certification

<http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/files/2014-03-21-Stackable-Credentials-Paper-FINAL.pdf>

- “Recent data indicates that professional certifications, licenses, and educational certificates **have labor market value**, especially for people without a bachelor's degree and **people with professional degrees.**”
- “This growing number of “**nontraditional students**”—including returning veterans; dislocated workers; and youth and adults with limited education, English, skills, or work experience—often have family and work responsibilities that cause them to stop out of school and **fail to return to complete credentials.**”
- “States and colleges are creating **foundational “lattice” certificates** that students can use as **launch pads for multiple pathways in related occupational fields.**”
- “Some of these foundational certificate programs are designed to help high school students and others exploring career options **get an exposure to a career field before committing** to an extended course of study in that field.”



Stackable credentials can be of particular help to professionals who face certain challenges, such as other responsibilities or lack of information about a field.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/05/23/understanding-differences-what-credentials-are-being-stacked-and-why-essay>

- “**Vertical Stacking**... credentials in a hierarchy -- with one level building on another, enabling the learner to progress toward a higher degree.”
- “**Horizontal Stacking**... learners expand their subject matter expertise by earning credentials in related fields that, collectively, prepare each person for a specific type of job.”
- “**Value-Added Stacking.** Combining the concepts of vertical and horizontal credential stacking... a learner adds an area of expertise to an existing two- or four-year degree with shorter-term credentials to prepare for a specific type of job.”



There are different ways to stack credentials to accommodate various depths and breadths of knowledge.

<http://fosteredu.pennfoster.edu/how-stackable-credentials-can-improve-outcomes-for-opportunity-youth>

- “The power of the stackable credential approach is that in re-starting their education **students aren’t required to make a huge commitment from the outset**. Minimal effort is required to get the ball rolling.”
- “In today’s volatile global economy, where ebbs and flows of regional economies are unpredictable and reverberate globally, where entire industries or regional economies can disappear in a decade, and where emerging economic powerhouses can appear seemingly overnight, there are **real advantages to choosing a short-term certificate program.**”



The fast pace of our modern world may create a need for stackable credentials