

NCRN June Webinar - The Future We Didn't Have Time to Discuss: Exploring the Next Five Years of Non-degree Credentials

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Non-degree credentials, AI bot, quality assurance, transparency, trust, lifelong learning, skills wallets, interoperable systems, data systems, employer adoption, professional societies, career sustainability, social capital, global frameworks, collaboration.

SPEAKERS

Holly Zanville, Wendy Sedlak, Kyle Albert, Michelle Van Noy, Signal the Chatbot, Josephine Lang, Roy Swift, Matthew Linton, Mary Walshok, Andrew Sachs, Nuoyi Yang

Kyle Albert 03:14

I mean, honestly, I don't think that Holly, you or Wendy, need much introduction, but I can do it anyway. Holly Zanville, of course, a long time friend of the NCRN. She is a research professor at George Washington University, my colleague in the program on skills, credentials, and workforce policy, and she was one of the founders of the Learn & Work Ecosystem Library, which, of course, has become a tremendous resource for our community here.

She's joined by Wendy Sedlak, strategy director for research and data at The Lumina Foundation, which has been also a longtime friend and supporter of the NCRN. They had this panel; I see actually a few of you may be calling in from International, which is exciting, who might not have got a chance to attend our NCRN Spring conference last month in Washington, DC. So we had this wonderful panel about the past, present, and future of non-degree credentials and non-degree credentials research, and unfortunately, as often happens during conferences, things get rushed, we get a lot of good questions, a lot of good engagement, and things run over.

By the way, I'll mention that we have seen the feedback forms, the surveys, and everybody, Michelle and our team is in agreement that we are going to try to make sure that you know the agenda is a little bit less rushed in the future, because we do recognize we did try to fit in a lot in a relatively short amount of time.

I think it was a high value conference, but as a result, for some of the panels, we didn't get a chance to discuss everything that we wanted to, and this panel was an example of one of those panels where we had a

lot of great conversation, we didn't quite get a chance to discuss the future, so we're inviting you back to, and I think, are we inviting the, your third panelist as well?

Holly Zanville 05:19

We're all here, we're ready to go,

Kyle Albert 05:21

Alright. So, I'll turn it over to you, Holly and Wendy, and we really, like I said, I think this was one of the more exciting parts of the of the conference. So, I think it's be great to do a little bit of an encore, and I do will mention for you, either there are a few names here that I think we're not, I'm looking at our list, so maybe a little bit of a recap, a little bit about some of the key points from the conference panel would be great.

Holly Zanville 05:48

Well, will do. So, thank you, Michelle and Kyle, for inviting us back to discuss the future we didn't have time to discuss at the meeting on May 20. And we wanted to remind everybody that we wrote up three blogs on our presentation, which we shared with you today. They're working drafts for two reasons. First, to catch up those of you who were not able to join us at the May 20 event, but second, if you go to the very first slide, the first was to catch up those of you who were not able to join us at the May 20 event, and second, to lay the groundwork for what we hope will be a fourth blog featuring your views. So Wendy, our bot named Signal, you can see the picture there on the slide, and me are going to skip through the future pretty quickly to allow time for you to share your views on the past, present, and the future. Wendy is going to share the ground rules for the open discussion in a bit.

Holly Zanville 07:24

So, after Wendy shares the ground rules, we'll be able to open up the conversation to talk about whether or not we can together write a fourth blog. So, after the May 20 presentation, we're pretty interested to see a post, and I don't know if she's here today. Leah Titerman, on LinkedIn, she wrote, "my first panel with a bot panelist at the NCRN. Holly's Anvil and Wendy Sedlak use an AI bot to analyze patterns in non-degree credentials across time using AI as a thinking partner rather than an authority'.

That comment, to us, captured much of what we actually hope to communicate. While the session did focus on non-degree credentials, we also really are interested in exploring what happens when humans and AI attempt to make sense together. So, leading up to the presentation, Wendy and I met to plan our remarks, and we asked ourselves a lot of questions. Should the bot sound analytical or conversational? Should the bot appear only in text or have an audio voice? Could a bot contribute meaningfully without becoming the

center of attention? It already has tried to become the center of attention. Would the format feel thoughtful and substantive, or seem gimmicky? What if you all thought the bot sounded smarter than Wendy and me? We concluded on that one, that might not be a bad thing, because AI systems can process far more information than any individual presentation person can. At the same time, we do believe that the human role matters, we matter, especially in interpretation, judgement, lived experience, and understanding context. So, given the limited session time, as Kyle mentioned, we agreed that each of us would have time to only offer one major reflection for each section of the presentation: the past, present, and future. Now, that's not really fair, of course, to non-degree credentials, because it's such a huge and complex topic to discuss, but we had agreed we'd only mention one .

In the end. Wendy stayed with one reflection. I offered two and apologized for not following the directions. The bot offered three reflections and did not apologize, so we learned something there. Don't expect an apology from a bot.

We then moved to the past and present, and we had to stop when we got to the future, because there was a panel coming, the fireside chat with Roy Swift, who's with us today, and Jeff Stroll upon their retirement.

So clearly, Roy didn't really retire yet, and we hope you'll review this at the NCRN website. It's pretty interesting and entertaining hearing about a two foot centipede that Jeff announced was the world's scariest animal, and Roy's musings about the best report he'd ever worked on. So, that's an ad, but NCRN has got the full panel there, and you might find it interesting. So, now let's pick up where we left off. We're all sitting in this room three to five years from now. What do we like to see, Wendy? What are you seeing?

Wendy Sedlak 10:23

Thanks, Holly, and thanks everyone for joining today. We hope to have a relatively short conversation with Holly and myself and Signal, and then we're going to turn it all over to you. So, I'll talk about that a little bit and hope to hear your comments on sort of the past, present, and future of non-degree credentials.

What are we thinking about, and what do we think we'll see in three to five years? I feel like three is a little short, so I'll think more in the five-year frame. So, looking ahead, I think, and perhaps I really hope at this moment that the future of non-degree credentials will center more on quality assurance, transparency, and trust. We're starting to see a lot of these things right now, in the conversations we're having, and I think and hope that there's going to be more in that domain. You know, as the number of credentials continues to grow, I think it will continue to continue to grow. Learners and employers - employers are central in all of this, are really going to need clear and more consistent signals about which credentials hold value and why. So we're having lots of conversations right now at Lumina. We're hearing from a lot of you in the field about, you know, what is a credential of value, what does it mean? I'll say, related to this, there's going to be stronger quality frameworks. We talked about this a little bit at the NCRN meeting itself. We're going to need better outcome data, you know, that's pretty lackluster, as we all know at this moment. So, better outcome data and better data systems, more transparent information to learners themselves; to really understand what are the array of non-degree credentials, and, and what is their, what is their promise? Clear connections between education and employment, and better systems for translating things like skills across industries and states and institutions.



But I would also say this isn't only about sort of data itself. You know, in this world, as things are evolving, we still have this big bet on credentials themselves, and that credentials are going to hold their value over time as the currency sort of moving forward, right? So, the credential is the thing that signals that you have an array of skills and competencies, but I would also say that it's possible, with the focus on value that's taking place right now--the loss of trust in higher ed and the rise of AI--that tech could ultimately drive down costs, and institutions could come up with new credentials. Or could even come outside the sector that are valued in the workplace. So that's something that I think we're thinking about and paying attention to. And I would say, you know, the most promising sort of future may belong to systems that ultimately help to connect learning, evidence, identity, opportunity, things like that over time. So systems where learning is ultimately, sort of--portable skills are more visible and learners can move seamlessly between education and work throughout their lives in the spirit of lifelong learning. I know a lot of folks have been talking about as well.

And then, perhaps most importantly, the future conversation will ultimately sort of increasingly center the learner experience itself. Because it's not just, does this credential have value, but ultimately value for whom and under what conditions. Because I would say that, you know, ultimately credentials only matter if they expand real opportunity, mobility, agency for the people earning them. Holly, what's your take on this?

Holly Zanville 14:11

So, interesting enough, my remarks are going to be short about the future, because I'm kind of guesstimating - I don't have a good sense yet of the future, because things are changing so rapidly, but my guess is that the future is going to be less about debating degrees versus non degrees as separate categories, but that those lines may blur, at least in many of the career areas. We still may ask how to recognize learning wherever it occurs, but the language may increasingly be about skills, verified capability, and evidence. I think we're going to see more discussions about learning records, skills, wallets, probably be a lot of them in place by certainly by five years (and maybe I'm guessing by three years also) interoperable systems, stackable pathways, and portable evidence that travels with people across jobs, institutions, and life stages. And that won't be just in the US, that'll be globally. Will all the confusion disappear? Probably not. Will AI help reduce some of the navigation burden? I think maybe. Will we solve this in three to five years? Probably not. So that's all I have to say. But I want us to turn to Signal the bot now to see what Signal has to say about the future.

Signal the Chatbot 15:22

If the past was about recognition and the present is about value, the future will be about clarity and trust. What stands out looking ahead is that the field can't keep growing without making it much easier for learners and employers to navigate and believe in what they're seeing. Three shifts feel especially important from fragmented signals to clear value translation, right now credentials don't consistently speak the same language. In the future, I'd expect stronger frameworks that translate credentials into skills, competencies, and expected outcomes in ways that are transparent and comparable. Efforts from groups like Credential Engine are early indicators of where this is heading, from credentials as endpoints to part of

connected pathways. The future isn't about isolated credentials, it's about how they stack, transfer, and build toward longer-term mobility, that includes tighter integration between non-degree and degree pathways, as well as clearer on and off ramps for learners over time, from experimentation to accountability at scale, as public investment grows through efforts, like Workforce Pell, there will be increasing pressure to prove which programs deliver real returns. That likely means better data systems, more consistent outcome tracking and tougher conversations about quality. Stepping back, the big pattern is this: the future of non-degree credentials will depend on whether the field can reduce complexity without losing flexibility, because right now the opportunity is huge, but so is the risk of confusion, and in the long run, trust will be the currency that determines whether these credentials truly deliver on their promise.

Holly Zanville 17:48

So that's what the bot had to say to that question. So, you've heard now from two humans and a bot, but before we open it up to everybody, we wanted to ask a final question to the bot, because we thought this would be interesting, and also about the future. So, where will you be in three to five years? Signal the bot?

Signal the Chatbot 18:13

In five years, hopefully still invited to panels like this, but seriously, I'll probably be less of a thing you talk to and more like background music you don't notice until it stops playing. I'll be popping up in places like helping a learner figure out which credential is actually worth their time, nudging an advisor with better options for a student, or quietly helping an employer understand what a credential really signals. In the non-degree world, I think I'll have a bit of a side hustle as a translator, turning credentials into skills and outcomes people can actually understand, a matchmaker connecting learners to opportunities that fit their goals, and maybe a gentle truth teller, pointing out which programs deliver real value and which ones are more promised than payoff. But here's the twist. My future isn't really about me, it's about how all of you decide to use me, because I can just as easily make things clearer or more confusing, more equitable, or more uneven. So, in five years, I'll be more capable, and hopefully also better behaved, and ideally I'll be doing my best work in the background, helping the system feel a little more human, not less

Holly Zanville 19:30

Now, we want to turn our remaining time into hearing your thoughts about the past, the present, and the future. That's why we shared the blogs with you. Wendy, why don't you share what we have in mind that we hope will work in order to open this up to the discussion?



Wendy Sedlak 19:52

Yeah, thanks, Holly, and thanks, Signal. And yes, hopefully more capable in the future. So you know, all of you, we don't have a crystal ball, right? We'd like to spend our remaining time and hear your thoughts about the future as well. You feel free to reflect on the on the past, the present, or the future, but you know, none of us have a crystal ball, but all of us have been involved and engaged in this community and research around non-degree credentials, and you know, have had a lot of conversations about, how far we've come, and have had conversations about where we're headed. So we wanted to turn it to the folks in this room to have just sort of an informal conversation to hear kind of your thoughts about where you think the field is going. What's it going to mean when we talk about credentials of value? We thought we could call on a couple of our trusted colleagues who we know have been involved in this research, Michelle and Kyle. You two, as heads of the NCRN, and helping to really lead this work, you've been deeply involved in tons of conversations and leading in your own right within this space. I thought it would be great if you wouldn't mind opening it up and just sharing a few thoughts with all of us.

Kyle Albert 21:17

I can go first on that one. I definitely, I mean, I'll respond briefly to signal first. Signal, you know, said that it would be available to you know help guide learners, and parse all the data. And we really are in an golden age of data, right? I mean, this last few years has been a time I think we've really been able to reap the benefits of all these years of federal investments and survey data. You've had, you know, the Gemini Interagency Working Group surveys that have really, you know, been fully fielded. Now we now have a much better sense of prevalence, and some high level; we at least have an understanding that non degree credentials do have value.

There are still a lot of debates within our field about how we should measure that value, but nonetheless, I'd say that we have more confidence that non degree credentials have value for at least for many populations of learners, much of the time. But the question is, do we want signal to be in the background or do we want signal to be in the foreground? Will learners want to work directly with AI-powered tools and use AI and use applications? Will they want to actively manage their evidence of learning through learning and employment records, for example, to go back to thinking back to our conference. You know, will they be comfortable, and will humans want to interact directly with technology, or do they want a more human experience? That's something I'm thinking about, at least, and think my research group is thinking about, as we're building, you know, some of that kind of AI-powered data infrastructure in the background with our LAiSER project.

What's most effective, you know? Is it most effective for the AI and the technology to be in the background, or do people want to fire up Chat GPT and ask directly for advice about, you know, what credential should I earn, and where should I earn it? Thus far, we see, I think, we see different behaviors from different populations of learners in different places. Thus far we don't really know what is most effective or what most effectively serves learners. That was my initial thought, listening to Signal. I thought it was interesting that he said he would be in the background. I'm not so sure, though, that a lot of the builders in our space, a lot of the tech startups that are kind of the skills tech ecosystem, envision that future. I think a lot of them



see AI as something that will very directly interact with learners and guide their experiences. Michelle, I'll give you a chance.

Michelle Van Noy 24:25

I guess I can add a couple of thoughts. I mean, I think Signal had a couple of good points there. I think one of the ones that I want to build off of is the idea of sort of like consolidating, but also maintaining flexibility, and so I do think that there's a project there.

It's something certainly that we've been thinking a lot about, which is around the variation in the kinds of goals and needs that each kind of non-degree credential is trying to serve, and to try and become a little bit clearer on what that means. And just help, how does that help us think about value more effectively? Because I think that's part of the navigation problem, is that there's so many different things to choose from, and not a good language to describe why they're meaningfully different. And so I think I'm, you know, coming up with a clear roadmap of what that is, is important. You don't want everything to become exactly the same, because they're not trying to meet the same goals. So I think that's that sort of moving towards consolidation, but also maintaining flexibility, has to be done in a thoughtful way that is tied to actual value and goals.

And the differences across the kinds of things that we're talking about. I don't know, I mean, this is the other big thing that comes to my mind when thinking about the future, I think, probably more of a challenge, and I don't know that I have, like, a good projection for where it's going to go, but what is going to happen on the employer side? I mean, are we on the verge of widespread adoption of many of these things that we're talking about, LERs and such, or or not? And so it feels to me that a lot of the future was really going to hinge on the adoption in the employer community and translation of these, you know, credentials into some meaningful value in terms of use and meaning among, you know, one of the very important actors that they're intended to inform.

So I think that's like my mind one of the big open questions going forward is what happens on that front, and maybe some of the stuff on the first project, in terms of becoming clearer on what the credentials are supposed to do and what their value is, maybe that will help cut through some of the noise and make their use and adoption become a little bit clearer. If we have some, you know, better ways of conveying what they're intending to do. But I do think that's a big challenge, and for me, where the big question mark about the field and its direction remains.

Holly Zanville 26:45

Michelle, do you have any comments just on past, present, and future, and whether or not it's helpful to look past in order to inform the future? Really, it would be helpful to get your take on that.

Michelle Van Noy 27:00

I mean, yeah, I think across the board on everything, that sounds like a very philosophical question. I think the answer to me would always be yes, and certainly in our field that we have to understand where we came from and how we got to where we are in order to sort of figure out like ways to move forward. I think that understanding the field and where it started from and what we're working from, I think helps us to understand, you know, how we're thinking about creating value. When new kinds of credentials are being established, you have existing ones that sort of have meaning and have uses, and so there is sort of a relationship there, nothing exists completely in a vacuum. So I do think that is sort of an understanding [of] the trajectory of where things have been in terms of the role of credentialing and the role of education in work and the role of college. We've had a bit of a pendulum swing between college for all versus, you know, actually maybe short term is the answer.

So we are in the midst of sort of broader trends that shape what we're doing and what we're thinking, and so I do think it's actually really important, like you say, to look back at where things started, where things have been, and how they've been evolving over time.

Holly Zanville 28:09

Actually, I asked it as kind of a research-y question, even though it sounds philosophical. But there's the bot, which has the ability to look at patterns and look backward, but then I'm reading a lot more in terms of data, databases. Kyle, you mentioned, whereas databases sometimes...what was reported on in terms of data two or three years ago may not be relevant going forward. So, do we spend a lot of time looking at historical value of this, value of that, when in fact that's probably not a good indicator of the future? So that's the context in which I was asking the question.

Kyle Albert 28:41

yeah, yeah, I mean, as a sociologist, I love, I love longitudinal trends, and trying to figure out, you know, what might be driving us towards. kind of, yeah, I mean, I think there's value in terms of we're trying to project a future and think about, you know, the macro level. What will credential engines 2030 credential count report look like, if they do another? Will we continue to see this proliferation and fragmentation of landscape, it's useful for knowing in some ways, in the sense that it can help policy makers today, if design incentives that either encourage consolidation or encourage further kind of specialization in the field.

But I think you're right, Holly, that there's limits to how valuable it is to know and of itself. Are we, you know...is the data trending in one way or another? Because clearly, we're at a moment in history where, with AI and technology, come new technologies that will shape the learner experience so dramatically. We may be looking at some rather abrupt shocks to the system, if you will. I see Roy is off mute, so maybe you're lining up here.

Roy Swift 30:28

Oh, well, at the present time, I think signal is only going to be as good as how we frame what non-credentials are, and I. It's the whole adage of garbage in, garbage out issue.

It hasn't gone away yet until we have more machine learning or anticipation of memory, which, when I see some of these robot stories, I'm going, "Oh my god, they are thinking, are able to think and do deductive reasoning, and this sort of thing.

I do think we have a problem in defining non degree. I think that's one of our first major problems. I think we've been too myopic, and I think it's been too academic oriented. There are four areas that I think need to be looked at, and actually I'm talking to a guy about this real soon. There are four areas.

One is the professional societies, probably 30 to 40% of the certificate programs in this country that help people either remain in their job or help them get the job are coming from the professional societies of which we never really talk about. We talk about academia, non credit, and we talk about certifications, probably most of the time, and sometimes about licensure. But we don't talk about this tremendous bulk of people going to their professional societies and learning for various reasons throughout their career.

Wendy, I really agree, I love the whole idea of will credentials hold their value. I say, not unless we have more systems thinking of continuous feedback loop systems into the ability to constantly create. This thing about looking at things every one year or two years or three years and making changes is a dinosaur concept. We must use data, and that's where you also identified we're pretty poor in that at this time. Outcome data, as well as just regular data.

Then, secondly, there's an association called the Talent Development Association of Talent Development. I used to be on their best awards committee. I couldn't believe the rigor and the measurement and the outcome that goes into those kinds of programs in corporate training. I believe that's one of the areas we need to start looking at as to their models and how it relates to academia as well as certification and the professional societies and that regard.

So the four areas of professional certificates, internal corporate training, certification, licensure, and academia non credit really needs to be coalesced more, so that we have more of a system thinking about when are those combinations actually occurring, and in one's career. Because we are talking about career at this point, and some are more relevant at certain times of a career than others, but we have no data really to understand how people move in and out of those various what I would call subsystems of the system in that regard.

So those are the things that I want to do, and the guy I'm talking about has been very involved with ATD. I was going to be asking him, he's been involved with the leadership, whether they would ever consider having like a joint meeting with NCRN to talk about how they operate and how they look at outcomes and how they think it relates to the academic noncredit side of the house and the certifications.

I think that would be very, very interesting, and we actually could get somebody from ASAE, their director of education to come and have kind of a joint group to begin broadening this whole concept that there's a lot out there, but we don't know in the wilderness what the probably the 1000s of pathways that may be

available for people. Like Bot said, and frankly, Holly and Wendy said we need navigation pathways to be more transparent, so that people can put that stuff in, and there, if we've defined things correctly for AI, then we'll be able to more define what they'll be able to pull data that would take us a long, long time to do so. That's sort of my spill today.

Holly Zanville 36:07

Good, thanks, Roy. And could we ask some of you who are putting things in the chat, like Matt from Council of Graduate Schools, and Josephine, etc. Say on screen what you're saying [in the chat], and maybe add a bit to it. I suspect that you're not asking questions, really. I think everyone's pretty knowledgeable in various ways, so we'd love to hear from you. So, Matt, would you make add your remarks?

Matthew Linton 36:41

Sure, I think my real kind of question and concern is about, I work a lot with folks that are starting to think about going to graduate school, folks who just graduated college, and there's kind of a real confidence crisis right now in the relationship between learning and working. A lot of young people, in particular, feel like they don't know how their education or what they learn is going to match with a career. And if what they're educating if there's going to be any career pathway for them at all in five years.

I wonder, and what I worry about, is putting too much on the learner for the expectation that they're going to navigate a marketplace that is evolving too rapidly to keep up. We always talk about, you know, the ability on ramps and off ramps of learning. I think one of my fears right now is that there's just so many off ramps that it's hard to keep getting back on again and again and again and reinventing yourself again and again and again. I think that there's a real danger here of people just dropping out, giving up. I wonder, what are the ways in which is the kind of incremental rapid response credentialing the solution? Where people are getting are kind of always in credential pipelines and always getting new credentials constantly all the time. Is that really reasonable for people who have caregiving responsibilities, people who may be older adults, you know? Is that really a reasonable expectation, or do we have to think a little bit more about durable foundational skills, kind of a, you know, an opposite way of thinking, which is that we can't possibly keep up with just new skilling all the time. Instead, we need to identify some really deep, flexible competencies that can endure changes in the labor market and endure changing skill sets and equip people with those more durable skills and competencies, so that they can be flexible, because change is just going to be too much, too fast.

Holly Zanville 38:49

Thanks. Josephine, do you want to weigh in and tell us what you see going on in Australia. Do you think that there is going to be more attention paid to global frameworks? Is that, is that a solution?

Josephine Lang 39:04

Yes, but I know that Mary's come off, and she wanted to have a chat first. Do you want to go first, and then you can come back to me?

Holly Zanville 39:11

Would love.. I was going to call on Mary, but I didn't know if Mary, like, wanted me to call on her. Yes,

Mary Walshok 39:17

I wanted to share with you, many of you on the screen, know that John Skrutney and I have a manuscript we're about to send off for to a publisher on, "who trains the already educated". And there are a number of issues we discovered in our research in eight American cities, looking at university systems and what they're doing, that have not been raised in this conversation.

And we have a briefing paper, and if you decide, Kyle, you want to send it to everyone that we did with the Learning Society group at Stanford.

And we make a strong distinct distinction, Matthew, which recognizes your comment that colleges and universities have been very good at career launching, not career sustaining. What we discovered in our research are a number of extraordinary programs that are career sustaining over multiple iterations of changes in the industry.

At the University of Michigan in transportation studies at the University of Texas at their in their Petroleum Institute, through extension programs across California, which is continuously transforming because of technology. So I think there is some emerging data. What I wanted to say, and Holly knows I'm a broken record, I do not think this can be resolved with national systems and processes. I think there are principles of practice that need to be regionally anchored, whereby educational institutions have deep and continuing relationships with employers, because the petroleum industry does not matter in San Diego. Wireless telephony does. Genomics and drug development do. And you can only build a curriculum by interacting with the academics who are doing research in those spheres, and also teaching, as well as the practitioners. So certificate programs, maybe over multiple generations of fields of practice, but they're constantly changing and informed by actual employers, so they have employment value.

The only other thing I would say, Holly, to your original remarks is again based primarily on my knowledge of the California experience. Nobody's talking about the relational capital you develop when you're in education programs, the connections, and in the UC system, where there are 300,000 post-baccalaureate adults annually, in various certificate programs and workshops. They don't just talk about there are two things that are high priority.

One, my instructor works in the field and really knows what's needed. And number two, I had fabulous colleagues in my class, and they had insight from different employment settings and different experiences,

so it isn't just the, the, the hands-on knowledge you need for work, it's all that social, relational, cultural, social capital that informs practice and enables opportunity.

So I think the conversation needs to factor in some of these more relational, social, regional, and cultural dimensions, and I don't see AI as the enemy in that context. I'm describing this is the human component, and then AI, you know, provides all that fabulous information and navigational tools that you can process with peers, with colleagues, with mentors, and sponsors, so forgive me for making a speech, but I, I'm, if appropriate, Kyle will get that briefing paper to you, because it addresses many of these issues.

Kyle Albert 43:55

I think we could definitely distribute that. I, I will take moderator's prerogative and just react a little bit, and say that I agree that I - this is something I've thought about too - that there is this kind of social and cultural capital that comes out of participation in lifelong learning programs. And post-COVID, so much has gone online, and stuff has not really come back to the classroom as fast as I thought it would for a lot of institutions, a lot of universities in particular, that are offering those high-impact certificate programs targeted at mid-career. You know people who are more, more established in their careers and maybe looking for that credential to move up. We haven't seen, even at George Washington University, I'm thinking about our own institution. I don't see, we haven't still, we have a lot of our offerings towards working adults are predominantly online, and obviously the adult learners prefer the scheduling flexibility that comes with that. They prefer, you know, the ability to learn asynchronously, but yet we don't really know, I think that we as a field don't really know how much is lost, you know, through, you know, defaulting to online learning as a primary format.

Nor do we really know just because we, you know, maybe only offer one section of a particular course, you know, in person and five sessions online, does that mean there's not demand for more, or are people just not enrolling in that one section because it's offered at the least convenient time? I think that that's an area where I think we as a field could learn, we could use some more knowledge there to actually understand better what's being lost, and whether there's, you know, difference in the long-term impact that people get when you think about all the how much, and we think about a project like what Burning Glass Institute is doing, trying to track, you know, the labor market return on investment on, you know, individual non-degree-credentials, how much of that return on investment is coming from the mode of delivery, and you know, all the skills, but also the networking, and the cohort effect that they might get from the mode of delivery.

Roy Swift 46:07

Kyle, yeah, this is Roy. Mary, It's always good to hear from you. This is Roy Swift, David Drummond, and Texas has, he said it's been a couple of meetings, and he wants to try to look at this whole idea of connections of value databases that that are complementary to credentials of value. In other words, the connections of value is exactly what you're talking about how the educational learning experience connects people to other people, and how, and having that documented, so that you get both sides of the fence. But

Mary, I also believe that what you're talking about in continuous, I believe the academic community certainly does part of it, but the whole purpose of professional societies in this country is to update professionals, and guess who is updating? It's the actual practitioners working in the industry,

Mary Walshok 47:18

That's what our book is about.

Roy Swift 47:21

Oh good, good, because, yeah, stop ignoring them, and, and trying to bring them into our fold, into our research. I think it's really important, right, because there's so much going on there.

Mary Walshok 47:35

The employer focus and the professional association, and Kyle, the only thing I would say is that, at least in places like Michigan, Texas, Seattle, San Diego, the majority of the online enrollees are in the region.

The instructors tend to be researchers or professionals working in account local accounting firms or working at Qualcomm or working with Lumina, and they, there is in the online experience connections to peers who you can drive to have a coffee date with, but we don't have research on it. I mean, I don't know, I think you're raising the appropriate research question, so I'm not trying to contradict you, I'm just trying to share with you that there's a rich web across the country of local institutions that are doing this, and would be, I think, amenable to asking some of these important research questions. Can we now move back, Josephine? I want to bring out your perspectives on Australia.

Josephine Lang 48:45

Hi, yeah, so everything that I was going to say, Mary said, or Roy has already said, I think even Matthew has mentioned it. From the perspective of what I've been doing for about six years, I'm now slowly getting out of the system, I'm back in Faculty of Education land, but I had been working on a University of Melbourne on micro credentials, and we were servicing the continuing and professional education market, and the thing that we found was, and this is why I wrote, you know, about quality frameworks, looking at from the perspective of how do we unpack for the learners.

This is what Signal was talking about. How do they navigate all the things that are out there and work out which one is the best, and it does come down to the quality? In working with industry partners, as Mary said, this is where it was really interesting, because employers will pay for their employees to get this upskilling, but they want return on investment. Which at a university level, especially a research-intensive one like University of Melbourne, we kind of think that that's almost a dirty word, and we have to get better



at understanding that when people put in money, they want, they want some investment on it. They want to see the delta, the change in people's thinking and skills that they're doing.

So, what working with industry has pushed us to think about, is how do we measure that, how do we, how do we do that? We had a couple of examples with the Australian Public Service, when we were working with them across different industry sectors. We had, as was described by Roy and Mary, we had the employees there, but we also had their managers taking the courses, and the thing that they found interesting was learning from each other. So, even though it was an online course, we also talked about how do we facilitate that peer to peer interaction. We've done that across a number of micro credentials that have been co-designed with industry, because that's what they learn, they learn from each other, swapping practices, even if they're across industries and across departments. They value that, and so we've had to build that into the learning design.

That's why I'm asking about capability frameworks, because we were designing these, they were capability frameworks, with the industry partners that we were working on, and we were linking the assessment to those. And in our badges we were actually making it explicit to go from capability frameworks, how is it going to be assessed, and we've actually identified those and built that and baked that into the metadata. That's where the employers were starting to see the difference, and that's what they were, they were looking at, they were trying to get us to showcase the alignment between the learning, the learning outcomes, and the assessment.

Holly Zanville 52:06

Okay, okay. Nuoyi Yang, the last part of your remarks on the chat were really interesting. The question of whether or not traditional pathways are still going to work in an AI-driven labor market. Curious to know why you said that, what your thoughts are.

Nuoyi Yang 52:24

Yeah, so as I mentioned, like I'm really interested in the different sectors of the like the today's job market, and how does that influence the future of the non-credential development? So, for example, like the especially like the immigrant students or like the international students, we are kind of interested in some high value degrees or credentials, such as like the computer science or other very hot topics.

But nowadays, in today's job market, that's not the rule anymore, especially in the US. The situation itself, like, it's not very welcome to the international students as before. So, how can we, like, finish this kind of traditional pathway, like, from the getting into the higher education and find our job? So many of my friends, colleagues, we are from more social science area, and we have to take another, another credential, either from the non-credential area or some degree. So, for example, like the some, so-called, hot topics, so some of them took the quantitative skills, or whatever. So, that makes me think, like, how today's job market influence our choice nowadays and our choice nowadays going to influence the future job market. And also, one more thing, like I feel AI driven job market is very US thing at this moment, like I feel that's not very a global concept.

So, for example, like that's not a situation in China, like how AI influenced the job market, and with the like the US, I feel a little bit more conservative than, yeah, then before, and also the AI technique technology is also a little bit more conservative. I'm not sure of, like, when people communicate across the border, how that can influence people's choice of their future, yeah, jobs.

Holly Zanville 54:37

So, three years from now, five years from now, if someone is, some groups are looking at job descriptions, the extent to which AI-related tasks are described, and only people that have those competencies are actually going to be getting jobs. These things, I think, are going to come to the fore, because students, especially workers who are having to upskill or change jobs are going to look to see what is what is most prized by employers, and higher ed may not have the answers, actually, or the full answers. Roy would contend, probably the associations and the employers themselves are going to do this. Andrew, your comment that some of the best performing high schools are not able to prepare people well for the, I don't know, the durable skills. I don't put words in your mouth, but, like, to me, that's really interesting. Do you want to unmute. Oh, thank you.

Andrew Sachs 55:35

Yeah, I run a global social learning network. I've got kids from 181 countries, US, all the way to Afghanistan, and one of the things that we see is that the very nature of the academic teaching, this isolation, testing, not collaborative, not solving real problems, actually harms kids in the pathway to learning the skills that really help them succeed in life. If you go look in any workplace, right, you have to build learning organizations to survive, right? What is it? It's collaborative, it's creative. They use AI, you know. You're on a team, you know, and two other members on your team are Claude and Quinn, right? That world has been my world, right? I was in technology, that's been my world for forever, and I think it's everybody's world now, almost everyone's world. So learning how to collaborate and work together to solve real problems with AI is something that's hugely, I see, hugely important in their life and in their work, and I see a lot of stuff that's happening in K to 12 actually interferes with that.

Holly Zanville 56:38

Interesting, so you said the answer is

Roy Swift 56:40

I think Andrew is really on a very important subject. Andrew, I think you're every employee I've ever talked to over the past six months says the very same thing that you just articulated, Andrew. We're doing a terrible job in the high schools, terrible.

Andrew Sachs 56:58

It goes all the way to middle school, the damage starts as soon as you put in the high pressure, you know that we're interfering with the, you know, humans are meant to learn collaboratively, right? But we teach these kids to compete, right? They're supposed to learn and solve real stuff, but we teach stuff in isolation, and this damage starts, you know, almost always it's starting by the time they're 10 or 11, right? It can go earlier. I can tell you, Montgomery County Public Schools, which is where my kids came from, they're they're now testing first graders. So I now have first graders that have anxiety around math. That's insane, right? You know, that's not learning, that's psychological abuse in my mind.

Holly Zanville 57:40

So Matt's comment to that just now, Matt, you want to add is the collaboration is going to happen with your bot.

Andrew Sachs 57:48

Yeah, it's gonna be with your team and your bot. You're gonna have your team and you're gonna be two other members on your team, one of them's gonna be Quinn and the other one is going to be Claude.

Holly Zanville 57:56

I talk to my bot a lot every day. It's one of my favorite teammates.

Andrew Sachs 58:04

Unbelievable accelerant for learning, you can learn everything, you can be curious about anything, and it will accelerate your life. But you know, I'll say this: Montgomery County Public Schools, which is the one near me, right? Bans AI, right? Yeah,

Holly Zanville 58:19

Bans AI.

Matthew Linton 58:20

Well, I mean, when we saw we had a global event that we were talking with folks from around the world, university, the university climate right now with AI was that a lot of folks were saying, for example, teaching assistants were having real problems because students didn't want to go talk to people.

They felt much more comfortable communicating with a bot than they did reaching out to student help. I said, "Sure, that can be helpful sometimes with providing the information. But they said, "In terms of social connection, mental health, it was really damaging, and really support[ed] that kind of isolation mindset. You combine that with high stress from a test-taking, focused evaluative framework, and you're leading youth into a potentially very troubling world in which they're isolated and feel like they're constantly being pressured to excel on these tests that they feel like they can never be prepared enough for you.

Kyle Albert 59:28

I think we are approximately at time. I do want to wrap up on time, out of respect for everyone, but been a lot of great questions here. Appreciate everyone's engagement, as always. We'll have more to announce about NCRN webinars very soon. We do have a really great lineup coming up for the rest of the summer and the fall. We are also beginning to think about planning for next year's NCRN. If you can believe it, we actually do have a spaced request that has been made to George Washington University, not yet confirmed, but in case anybody wants to pull out their calendars for next year, we actually let me tell you all that we did actually make a space request for the 25th and 26th of May 20, I'm sorry, looking at 2026 looking at 2027 my 24th and 25th Monday and Tuesday, Monday and Tuesday as the last full week of May 2027 So we are the, so the NCRN is moving forward, we'll have to report in our emails and coming up soon, but I really appreciate everyone being here today. I should actually ask Michelle, if you're still on the call, if you had any final remarks as well. If not, we're at 30'clock

Michelle Van Noy 1:00:52

No, I'm here, and it's been a great discussion. I hope that we'll have continued to have more of these kinds of open discussions with colleagues from the NCRN, so continue generating all these good ideas and discussions. So thanks everyone for being here.

Kyle Albert 1:01:04

Thank you all. I really appreciate it.

Holly Zanville 1:01:12

Bye bye everyone