



Digital badges communicate learning outcomes from flipped classroom to employers

Santa Barbara City College - Career Skills Institute

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Melissa Moreno

dean of Educational Programs,
Santa Barbara City College (SBCC)

The challenge

Community colleges across the United States face a similar problem — ensuring the courses offered align with the needs of the workforce. Employers agree that job-specific qualifications are an important part of the hiring process, but report that candidates are missing the kinds of business-critical soft skills that are not always taught in school.

According to Melissa Moreno, dean of Educational Programs for Santa Barbara City College (SBCC), “We are actively connected to local employers and heard very clearly from them that workers lacked skills such as communication, innovation, critical thinking, team building and conflict resolution, among others.”

It can be easy to think of these skills as inherent: Either you have them or you don’t. And furthermore, for anyone who does possess soft skills, it can be incredibly difficult to qualify and document them in a way that provides context and can be verified.

“Through SBCC’s Career Skills Institute,” Moreno explained, “we decided to shift that paradigm and focus on a series of noncredit courses that would provide professionals with the 21st century skills necessary to succeed in a business environment in a way that would be portable, verifiable and in many cases align with a certificate from the state of California.”

The solution

SBCC’s Career Skills Institute developed a flipped classroom model to build out more than 40 short courses that leveraged content available on Lynda.com. For each course, instructors curate a playlist of educational videos that students watch prior to attending class. “This approach allows for the kind of flexibility that adult learners need, since many of them are employed full time,” Moreno said.

Once in class, students spend their time using the skills learned through Lynda.com to work through real-world workplace challenges to further develop their abilities. At the end of each course, students complete a capstone or portfolio project to demonstrate his or her proficiency in the soft skills.

Before sending students to employers, the Career Skills Institute provides many of them with a digital badge, issued through Pearson’s badging platform, Acclaim. These badges can be shared anywhere online that a student would like, such as LinkedIn, or in an email signature. An employer can click on the badge to view the full context of the course and related skills and know it is verified.

“We currently offer badges for over 40 of our soft skills courses,” Moreno explained. “It’s our goal to offer more in the future, because the badge really is the right way for our students to communicate to employers what they’ve learned and how they’ve demonstrated proficiency.”

The results

In the first two semesters of this new program, SBCC issued 72 badges to 35 students. “The fact that students are earning multiple badges means that the Career Skills Institute is providing content that is stackable,” Moreno said. “Skills are building on skills and by representing them with badges, our students can align what they learn through our courses with other forms of learning, credentials and professional experience, to build a more complete picture for employers.”