Strategy #2: Industry Recognized Credentials

Session 1: Equitable Policy Considerations for Credit for Industry Recognized Credentials

Policy Considerations: Credit for Credentials

The following suggestions are compiled from multistate examples of effective Prior Learning Assessment policy.

Standards and Values

Key Components: Quality, Transparency, Equity

This section sets the stage for the rest of the policy and identifies the institutional values associated with the practice of awarding credit for institutional credentials. Quality standards are most often associated with instruction and assessment. The content and required demonstrations of skills ensure that learners can use what they know effectively.

Transparency is judged by the outward facing information related to the credential: this might include curriculum competencies, assessments used, evaluator credentials, or instructional credentials. The value of transparency for the student and the institution is the trust that comes from having all of the information they need.

Language that supports equitable practices, including, but not limited to: Credential evaluation independent of any student demographics, outreach and access measures to ensure widespread participation, and learner support for engaging in the application process

Shared Definitions

Examples of words/phrases that need to be well defined: Credential, Assessment, Equivalency, Evaluation, Skill/Competency, Proficiency/Mastery, Articulation, portfolio

Clear policy language relies on agreed upon definitions of key terms. Never make assumptions about the level of the user's understanding of these.

Marketing/Recruitment

Key Considerations: Transparency, end user needs/experience, stakeholder partnerships

Potential beneficiaries of this policy need friendly access to clear, timely information that allows them to make informed choices when it comes to applying for and/or accepting credit for an industry credential. To this end, policy language should include values and guidance on how information is communicated, distributed, and updated. That information should include program specifics in relation to credentials, pathway information with clear crosswalks from industry, and accurate and informed advising practices.

Application Process

Key Considerations: Efficiencies of scale, documentation

Programs enhance their ability to scale and sustain this practice by identifying areas where they can create efficiencies of time and effort. There should be a stated value here around the identification and elimination of duplication to support staff efforts. The first opportunity for efficiency happens at the application point. The policy should suggest the elements/data to be gathered during the application process while allowing institutions to customize forms to their needs. Attention should be paid to the cross campus nature of this practice and include key information related to all stakeholders.

For example: Include demographic data to track and assess student success, information on the credential identified for evaluation and the course(s) or programs associated with the request, information about required artifacts and the process for submitting them, any other required documentation, information about eligibility criteria, local policy on credit limits, application or evaluation fees, and routing and signature protocols.

Credential Evaluation

Key elements:

Faculty related: required training, evaluation standards, roles, and scope of responsibility, standardized practices in making credit determinations and approving course crosswalks.

Registrar related: Student record data standardization, efficiencies for evaluated crosswalks.

All stakeholders: An agreement to conduct periodic or time sensitive evaluation of assessment practices, credentials, and crosswalks.

Faculty members and subject matter experts should be explicitly cited as the first and best source for the evaluation of industry credentials. Strong policies define required evaluator training, establish consistent standards for evaluation

across disciplines, build in accountability measures, and endeavor to reduce duplication and build trust in the process and the efficacy of the credits.

The Student Record

Key Elements: Coding/transcription protocols, resident credit requirements, transfer and prior learning credit caps by program, maintenance of articulation agreements

The policy should establish clear guidance for gathering data and entering information into the student record.   This is crucial to maintaining accurate records but also to building the institutional case for this kind of activity by allowing data to be mined for student benefits and outcomes. A clear determination of how many credits students can earn through this method, and in combination with other transfer credit or prior learning methods, should be part of the institutional policy. If these caps are dependent on departments, they should be required to provide a rationale for their determinations to aid transparency. Articulation agreements should be standardized to include language related to prior learning credit. An example of this is the addition of the statement that "credit is accepted for transfer no matter how it is earned, based on approved prior learning evaluation processes."

An Established Grievance Process

Key Elements: the process of evaluation and findings, standard language associated with re-takes and re-evaluation, and policy associated with refunding of fees.

Excellent policies have a clear protocol for learners to grieve the evaluation process and/or to be able to re-submit evidence as appropriate. It is standard practice to let students know before they pay for an evaluation that their payment is non-refundable, regardless of outcome; the cost covered is the evaluation, not credits earned.

Policy Evaluation and Review

Key Elements: Established process of reviewing and updating credential evaluations. Established practice around identifying and reviewing new credentials.

Industry credentials can be time dependent and are often updated or upgraded to meet industry demand. Policies should include expectations for timely review processes. In addition to this, new credentials are always being developed and need to be incorporated into your offerings. Having a policy in place that specifically addresses this will help to expedite the recognition process.