Scaling Non-Degree Education

eBook

From the Editor

Every higher education leader knows that lifelong learning is the future of our industry.

Colleges and universities can no longer rely on traditional-aged student enrollments. The adult student population is growing at twice the rate as the traditional-age student population, and demographic shifts indicate that this trend will continue into the future.

This fundamental change means higher ed needs to shift.

But the shift to serving adults is more than a sound business decision. As students transition from college to career, they won't stay in the same position or career field in the way their parents did. With the rapidly evolving workforce, learners continue to look for ways to upskill and reskill to stay relevant in the workforce.

Learners want short-term, stackable programming. They need to able to earn credentials at their own pace and show their current skills to employers. It's critical for modern higher ed institutions to provide entry and exit points that will allow them to continue learning for a lifetime.

By becoming an educational resource and guide for learners at every stage in their lives and careers, students will continue to come back to the academy for more, which will not only serve the mission but also sustainably drive enrollment and retention rates.

But success will take more than a "Built it and they will come" mentality. These learners are often juggling multiple responsibilities—their job, families, caretaking—and they need flexible programming that will fit into their busy schedules.

Beyond unique and flexible delivery, institutions also have the opportunity to reshape credentialling, services, and scheduling to meet the expectations of this diverse demographic.

A modern college or university will be able to meet the needs of the non-traditional learner by adapting its curriculum and delivery models to be more flexible, transferrable and reflect the lifelong learning model.

To help illustrate the value of this focus, we've compiled this eBook of articles by EvoLLLution contributors exploring different facets of scaling non-degree education. Hopefully it provides some inspiration to help your institution find its new normal.

Sincerely,

Amrit Ahluwalia
Editor in Chief, The EvoLLLution

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The evoLLLution®

Prioritizing Integration Critical to Finding the Right System that Facilitates Non-Credit Growth

BOB PETERSON
PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE CORPORATE COLLEGE, CUYAHOGA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Implementing a new back-end system for non-credit education is a serious undertaking for colleges and universities. The challenges compound when the non-credit system must integrate into a robust, well-established main campus system. In this interview, Bob Peterson discusses Tri-C Corporate College's experience finding and implementing a new customer lifecycle management system to support college-wide non-credit program registrations and management while integrating tightly into the main campus's Banner Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.

The EvoLLLution (Evo): Why is non-credit programming so important to a community college?

Bob Peterson (BP): Community colleges have always had a particular emphasis on workforce training, whereas traditional four-year colleges have generally offered more theoretical programming and less applied hands-on training. Today, with the skills gap that exists in North America, employers are having a hard time finding qualified people with the right skills for the jobs they're looking to fill.

What we're emphasizing now more than ever is that Tri-C has non-credit workforce training programs that can provide employers in Northeastern Ohio with a skilled workforce—because at the end of the day, the success of our region is going to depend on whether we have a skilled workforce or not. If we don't have a skilled workforce, employers are going to relocate, or they're going to go out of business. Our community college, and I think all community colleges in the United States, understand that.

We actively engage with employers throughout the region so that we can understand what their specific training needs are. Then we look at our offerings and make sure that our current programs can meet those needs. If not, we modify them or create new programs so that employers' needs are being met.

Evo: What were some of the key challenges that Tri-C was trying to address when you and your colleagues began searching for a new system for non-credit registration?

BP: One of the challenges we faced was making sure the needs of all of the various non-credit areas within the college were being met. Tri-C is a large community college with four academic campuses and four different workforce campuses, and our non-credit programming is decentralized. We have traditional non-credit workforce training. We have non-credit community education programs. We have Encore, which is a senior's program for adults 55 and older. Our academic campuses offer some community programs—things like dancing or swim lessons or yoga classes—that are not part of workforce training, but are non-credit and need to use the registration system.

While the primary user of the new system was going to be our non-credit workforce training programs, we had all these other, smaller ancillary areas within the college that

all needed to be able to use the system. We had to look at other diverse areas within the Tri-C and make sure that Destiny One met their needs too.

Evo: Why did Destiny One stand out to you as an ideal solution?

BP: One of the important specs that we had in the RFP we issued was the ability for the new system to communicate with our Banner ERP system. That was a particular advantage that Destiny One had over the competition: Destiny could communicate with Banner, and the competition could not.

The second important factor for us was Destiny's experience with community colleges. Some of the other products on the market were being offered by vendors who were just breaking into the community college market with a newer offering, and we didn't want to be a guinea pig. Destiny has a pretty wide and diverse college user group, and it's growing. Being able to reach out and talk to other colleges like us was important. We could make sure that their experience with Destiny was good. We had our IT folks talk with IT folks at colleges that were also Banner ERP users, because that integration was very, very important to us. We were able to satisfy our due diligence questions by having phone calls directly with other colleges that had successfully implemented Destiny One.

Destiny One is also very user friendly, both from an internal and an external perspective. That combination of factors is why we reached the conclusion that Destiny One was the ideal solution.

Evo: Why is it so important for your non-credit system to integrate into and communicate with the main campus Banner ERP system?

BP: We're a robust user of Banner, and we believe in the product. If Destiny One didn't integrate with Banner, it would have effectively created a two-step process where student registration and financial information would not automatically migrate into Banner. It would have to be downloaded and then uploaded. With that, you always have the possibility for errors. It's not as an efficient a process.

Because we rely upon Banner so heavily to operate and manage our college, that was a very, very important issue for us. Obviously, if none of the vendors were integrated with Banner, we would have had to pick our poison, so to speak, but the fact that Destiny One had a track record of successfully integrating with Banner, and we were able to verify that in the due diligence process, gave us a certain level of comfort.

Evo: What did it take to motivate staff to shift to new business processes? How do you expect the staff experience to change as Destiny One becomes an ingrained part of the way non-credit works?

BP: We needed to make sure people understood that we didn't just decide to change our non-credit registration system on a whim. The product we had been using prior to Destiny One was no longer being supported by the vendor, so we shifted out of necessity—and a big part of the transition process involved making sure that people understood that. We didn't want to be relying on a non-credit registration system that wasn't being supported, especially as the possibility of it crashing and developing problems would exponentially increase once the support period expired.

The other big part of the process was making sure our team understood what Destiny had to offer. There are a lot of capabilities in the Destiny system that are very exciting and of great interest for our users. Once they saw that, and could see how it would enhance the student experience and grow enrollment while making their job easier, people started coming on board. It allowed us to change resistors into team players.

Evo: How do you expect the student experience to evolve for non-credit students at Tri-C with the Destiny One system in place?

BP: On our credit registration side, about 80 percent of our students register for classes online. With our old non-credit registration system, our online registrations were at about 20 percent. Our team would receive phone calls on a daily basis from non-credit students who were angry and exasperated because they weren't able to successfully register online.

I'm responsible for workforce non-credit training enrollment numbers. If I have angry students, we have to talk them off the ledge, calm them down and then get them registered for a class. How many people don't call and just walk away and go to another college to take a workforce training non-credit class? We can't capture that data, but it was clear that we were losing students because people just got fed up.

We expect Destiny One to result in an increase in overall enrollment, but especially a surge in people who register online. Our goal is to move from 20 percent, which is horrible, to 80 percent, which is where it is on the credit side.

In less than six months, we've seen an increase in the number of students that are registering online using Destiny. In that time, our online registrations have grown 52 percent over the same period the previous year. That's an early positive indicator.

This interview was edited for length and clarity.

Growing Non-Credit Programming: Central to Institutional Success

GARY MATKIN
DEAN OF THE DIVISION OF CONTINUING EDUCATION AND VICE PROVOST OF THE DIVISION OF CAREER PATHWAYS, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

Colleges and universities across the United States are scrambling to find new revenue streams and marketplaces that can help to offset the losses caused by declining traditional student populations and increasing competition. One marketplace to which many institutions pay limited attention is non-credit education, which provides practical, responsive and non-degree-based programming to a wide range of students. However, success in this space requires institutional understanding, commitment and investment. In this Q&A, Gary Matkin discusses the importance of non-credit higher education and shares his thoughts on some of the challenges many leaders face when trying to grow this programming at their institutions.

Evo: What is the value of non-credit higher education for non-traditional students?

Gary Matkin (GM): First off, the whole label "non-credit" is wrong because it basically compares all kinds of learning with the formal learning that we get in schools where credit is a factor. I just really don't like the idea of the word non-credit because it denigrates the importance of what really is very important in today's world and it diminishes what I think is a very important role for the university to play. This is the first obstacle to seeing the true value of this kind of education.

Informal learning is important. People always need to learn different things and, the real issue for universities revolves around the appropriateness of offering learning that is not related to formal degree programs.

Evo: How does this notion that non-credit higher ed is somehow "lesser than" formal, for-credit programming impact the way institutions approach this type of education?

GM: The first problem is that the metrics and standards for formal education are different than the metrics and standards for informal education. When we talk about quality in degree education, we're talking about a whole infrastructure and history of what creates quality in a degree program. That quality is generally based on what is taught, who teaches and how it is taught. The higher quality stuff is usually harder to learn, therefore people with PhDs are supposed to be better at teaching the material. And who is taught? Our institutions are judged by the quality of the students that they actually turn away.

Those three elements are absolutely contrary to the quality standard for informal learning, where you want to make sure that people are learning what they want to be taught and that those who need learning the most often are those that have the most difficulty in learning. In terms of who teaches, that quality standard is almost irrelevant as long as that person understands the needs of the learner and can meet those needs. While the standards and metrics for informal learning are completely different, they're nevertheless relevant.

Evo: What sparked your interest in non-credit higher education?

GM: All of my work has been at land-grant universities. They have a special obligation to help the people learn as they're based upon bringing that university knowledge base down to a very practical level.

Moreover, I've always been very interested in the tension between academic elitism and the notion of serving a larger population with learning from the knowledge base of the entire university.

Evo: What role can non-credit programming play in helping people find work?

GM: There are a lot of skills and abilities and competencies that you need in the workplace that are not taught in the formal classroom. For instance, engineers all have to learn how to use computer-aided design, yet university courses in this are very few and far between because universities are not supposed to be teaching how to use software. That's too applied, that's not theoretical. However, to be an engineer you have to use that tool.

The idea is that a university has an obligation to help engineers be the best they can be so it's logically obligated to supply some sort of learning in that realm. There are a lot of skills needed in the workplace that universities would never address in their formal education, yet we're producing these graduates and we're asking them to go into the workforce unprepared.

What we're trying to do with non-degree programming is to fill in those skills to help our students—enrolled in campus-based programs, MOOCs and everything in-between—be truly effective in the workplace. It's non-credit but it's very important for people and their lives.

Evo: What would it take to blend the practical learning of the non-credit side with the theoretical learning of the for-credit side of an institution?

GM: It's important to make sure we're talking about the right audience. Traditional-aged 18- to 22-year-old university students looking for a residential experience are honing their life skills as they come to college. One of the reasons they come to college is to be on their own, to be independent, and to gain those life skills along with the academic skills they need to be effective later on. What we don't focus on frequently is the skills they need to be effective in the workforce. One strategy for that audience is to embed in their co-curricular experiences—including internships and jobs and so forth—the experiences and skills that they need in order to be effective in the workplace.

Informal learning is important. People always need to learn different things and, the real issue for universities revolves around the appropriateness of offering learning that is not related to formal degree programs.

For the non-traditional audience—the older people who already have developed their own personalities and ways of dealing with adult life—they frequently have specific gaps or identifiable gaps in their skills and competencies. Let's say they don't know how to deal with clients very well; there are non-credit training programs that can help them with that.

In either case, the informal learning is extremely important to the success on the job.

Evo: How are universities approaching the development of non-credit programming?

GM: Universities have a knowledge base that can be very important in all kinds of learning and very important to informal learning. So how does a university share that base effectively to serve learners' needs when and as they need it? One of

the approaches comes from the modularization of learning. We see a lot of formal learning being broken down into smaller parts in order to serve informal learning needs.

> **Non-credit programming should be thought of as additional or supplemental to the experience that we're providing students as they graduate. It's a role that universities have historically played, which is to provide the society with some kind of knowledge and expertise.**

Evo: What does it take for a university to create a non-credit program that can provide labor market value to its students?

GM: First is a recognition that it's a logical thing for a university to do. Some universities would say that's just not what we do—that it's for a community college or some sort of soft skill provider or something like that. My feeling is universities can do a very good job at these less formal, more practical and applied learning opportunities because they have the knowledge base upon which to ground them.

If we were to give a course on how to deal with the frail elderly for example, we have the background of medicine and psychology of aging that inform the way we prepare for a clinical, practical, applied approach to dealing with this demographic. We have the opportunity to do a better job than even a hospital does because we have the knowledge base behind this.

The first thing is to recognize that the university really does have a legitimate role to play and it's not inconsistent with its traditions. The second is institutional will—saying we do care enough about our students that we want them to be successful in life and we're willing to invest some of our time and energy in helping them achieve that success.

Evo: What are some of the main concerns faculty have with non-credit programming, and how can those issues be overcome?

GM: Faculty are very busy and how they spend their time is very important to the university. The university wants them to spend their time on being better teachers and being better researchers and discovering new things. They're not necessarily interested in having them figure out how to apply the theories that they're proving in the practical life.

The first way of handling that is to develop institutional infrastructure like University Extension or Continuing Education operations that can leverage faculty time and also bring in experts with knowledge related to the university knowledge base but who are not necessarily a direct part of the university. I'm talking about graduates who are in professional fields and have the formal educational experience that is really necessary for university-level work.

Evo: Is there anything you'd like to add about increasing the footprint of non-credit programming on campus and in society?

GM: Non-credit programming should be thought of as additional or supplemental to the experience that we're providing students as they graduate. It's a role that universities have historically played, which is to provide the society with some kind of knowledge and expertise.

I think of the learning objectives of students that do not involve degree work as being an object of worthy attention by the institution, but it needs special expertise in order to do that. Moreover, it needs a special kind of institutional will and investment to do it really well. It's something that's really important in order for the university to really continue to fulfill its contract with society.

This interview has been edited for length.

Unbundling Credit Programming into Non-Credit Offerings

BETH ROMANSKI
DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL AND CONTINUING EDUCATION, MARYLAND UNIVERSITY OF INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

In transferring to a remote environment, it's time for institutions to rethink their educational offerings. Unbundling credit programs provides learners with fast and consumable options that will help get them back into the workforce. To do this, faculty and leaders need to look at their current educational structure and analyze what can stay, go and where there's opportunity for growth or change before they do anything else. In this interview, Beth Romanski discusses the importance of unbundling, creating more flexible access for learners and the financial implications that come with this shift.

The EvoLLLution (Evo): Why is it important to unbundle credit programming into non-credit formats and how does it benefit learners?

Beth Romanski (BR): From the learner perspective, it's important to rethink how institutions are delivering their educational offerings to remain relevant to a continuum of lifelong learners. As higher ed institutions, we possess a wealth of resources within our academic curriculum. We should be asking ourselves how we can capitalize on some of the most specialized content— the areas that make our institution special and in which we have expertise—and provide it to learners in a more consumable fashion. While formal degrees remain valuable, there is a large market of lifelong learners seeking specialized credentials or targeted skills for personal and professional development. Much

like "customers," the learner of today may benefit from targeted micro-learning options allowing them greater customization of content to fit their personal and professional interests.

It's also important to think about the resources we're providing people with to get a faster return on their investment. It might take somebody a couple of years to complete an academic program, which seems like a long time during which to invest both time and financial resources. As an adult learner, you often want to take what you're learning and apply it right away on the job or in your own life. So, how do we take that approach to designing our curriculum and deliver it in different ways to truly benefit the student? We can remove segments from the academic course, so content becomes more condensed and in an easily consumable format. This unbundling approach also provides flexible start and end dates to fit busy schedules. Essentially, unbundling credit provides a unique opportunity for students to personalize and customize their learning experience in ways that benefit them most.

Evo: Why is there a laser focus, such a commitment to student-centricity, in non-traditional education divisions?

BR: The idea is that we're really here to serve the adult learner. It's like a customer experience, wherein we see

value in what they bring and what they have to offer. It's a partnership in learning—which isn't always the case in a traditional model.

Evo: Why is it important for universities to start to look at ways to create more flexible access and program delivery to learners who might not be looking for that traditional degree experience?

BR: There are certainly multiple barriers within many types of institutions. But if it's something that you can encourage your institution to at least pilot, there's a great opportunity to leverage in terms of resource maximization.

We are all operating in a resource-limited environment, so we need to be creative and open to new ways of operating. So, what resources do we have available to use and leverage to provide learning content as a potential solution? We can adapt to the shift that the learner is expecting in delivery models, as we've seen it in alternative education providers, MOOCs, companies and CE providers themselves in today's marketplace. People are actively looking for different ways of learning. Why aren't institutions taking advantage of it? In my opinion, we're not diluting the academic experience; the unbundled approach simply provides new opportunities for learning through the specialization of content. If we can leverage the expertise and content the institution already has, it becomes a win-win scenario.

Evo: What does it takes to unbundle a credit bearing program into a variety of non-credit offerings?

BR: That's the biggest question—it's a great idea, but how do you do it? With my previous experience at a variety of different institutions, I'm fully aware that the barriers are institution-specific at times. As adept CE leaders, you may have to navigate the political landscape of that particular situation to be successful, but you can often find allies even in a more traditionally minded institutional model. I was fortunate to be able to move this concept forward more easily at my current institution, Maryland University of Integrative Health (MUIH), because we are open to innovation..

In my current role as director of professional and continuing education (PCE) at MUIH, we launched a new PCE division from the ground up that primarily focuses on a portfolio of online professional continuing education offerings. When you're faced with the challenge of starting with nothing, you have to be creative in true entrepreneurial fashion. So, I asked myself, where can we begin with limited resources? I saw this unbundling approach as an opportunity and began forging partnerships with my colleagues in other academic departments. I would ask what they thought was needed in their industry and where there might be some opportunities for us to leverage content. Together, we identified relevant courses that would be easier to reshape in an unbundled model.

When "auditing" a course for an unbundling opportunity, one thing to think about is what the learning objectives are and, using Bloom's Taxonomy, how can we rethink them in a competency-based education format. First, look at what needs to be modified and what can stay at the high level. For course audits, create a rubric with criteria for how PCE and academic programs should align to guide the process. For example, you can consider delivering content through more interactive and engaging mediums, like mini video lectures, rather than just assigning readings. For assessments, you may modify a 10-page research paper to an evaluation that's more reflective of or appropriate for direct professional application.

You also may want to think about aligning the curriculum in a way that matches CE use for professional organizations, if that's a target market for the course. You should evaluate the course's key highlights and core integrity but also attempt to look at it from a learner's perspective. Would you engage with this content? Is it interesting and useful? There is no one "right" way to go about it, but it does help to have a consistent format within your professional programs, if possible. It comes down to thinking about education holistically and creatively, which is really fun for me. I encourage those who think it's difficult to understand that it can be as simple or as complex as you want to make it.

Now, there are some implications in terms of politics and processes, such as, will an endorsement from faculty or subject matter experts be needed? These types of details should be considered given your specific institutional context, but once you have a solid framework developed for how to unbundle a course into micro-learning opportunities, it's much easier to take that model and replicate it with other courses.

Evo: How do you build a framework that makes scaling part of that initial conversation?

BR: I always have a vision for a course—I can see what can be utilized and how it can be transformed. There are a lot of things that you can do with technology, so

capitalizing on the learning management system is really important to making the course more comprehensive and competency-based.

When scaling, you can unbundle a course and offer it in several ways. Let's say you have a graduate course worth three credits that consists of several modules delivered over the course of 14 weeks. Each module (topic) within that one course could be broken down into a series of mini professional continuing education offerings. Each of those mini courses be "sold" individually, or as a program at a bundle discount rate.

It's akin to a cafeteria-style learning, wherein you get to build your education like you build your own salad at a salad bar, choosing toppings based on your preferences. That's more what people expect in the educational "shopping" experience now. Adult learners like to be able to pick and choose what's going to benefit them, and the learning process should be easy and enjoyable.

Despite contrary belief, you can think about education in a fun way while maintaining academic integrity. You do that by leveraging the learning experience while providing meaningful content with practical assessments that will have students using what they learned. Educating professionals is not just about theory—it's also about application and relevancy to the real world.

Evo: What are some of the revenue and financial aid implications of making this shift from credit to non-credit?

BR: I've seen a lot of different models since all institutions will differ from one another. We have to recognize that this is an opportunity to increase revenue by attracting new audiences in new markets. We can use unbundled content to create beneficial partnerships with employers, organizations and professional associations and boards for those in need of specialized training. In today's fast-paced world we all need to constantly upskill, to get a better job or to change careers, or perhaps to earn CEUs to maintain professional certification/accreditation.

It's important to think about content available to organizations where people may have significant resources, such as employer tuition assistance or training dollars. Often, professional and continuing education programs are offered at a lower price point, but if someone is paying out of pocket, we still have to think about that price and do a competitive analysis, and charge what makes sense for the offering.

From a business standpoint, I recommend taking the time to evaluate who your audience is, what you're delivering, and price based on value while also remembering that the end goal really to reach new markets that wouldn't otherwise be exposed to your institution.

Another area of potential concern is the question of ownership—who "owns" the intellectual property of the content you wish to unbundle. That aspect will obviously have to be discussed internally at every institution given the contractual arrangements for developers and faculty. At MUIH, I've found ways to engage with subject matter experts and faculty, and I have created a structure that will ideally incentivize them—either through faculty service recognition or additional compensation. As a CE leader, it's really important to build those partnerships within the institution as well to ensure you're on the same page and all doing this for the right reason—to provide greater access to education for all.

Evo: How could you structure an unbundled credit offering in a non-credit format in terms of its delivery to students, and how could you structure the offerings more generally as a product?

BR: This is where it gets exciting because there are endless opportunities! There's a self-paced, on-demand online format, in which people enroll whenever they want and proceed through the content at their own pace to earn their credential. This highly flexible, self-directed model is what we're recognizing as the appeal for the shorter MOOC-style courses.

Then we have a model of mini courses that comprise an inter-related program. And again, these are modules within courses that can be unbundled so that they can be enrolled into and "sold" individually or positioned as a professional certificate, program, or master class series. The program or bundle can be then priced at a discounted if a student purchases the program versus enrolling in each of the courses individually.

At MUIH, we've built an online mentorship program, which is a really exciting way to combine the flexibility of the self-paced, self-directed format with an instructor-led course. At certain points where most beneficial to the learning and assessment process, you'll have a professional faculty or mentor come in and give you that personal touchpoint of one-on-one support and feedback that truly embodies individualized learning. The one-on-one support is there when most valuable, but the student retains much flexibility to complete the course at their own pace.

For a more traditional approach, you can offer the classic instructor-led cohort model over the course of several weeks. Personally, I prefer scaling a course back to be shorter for the adult learner, no more than 8 weeks.

Membership programs can be another interesting way to have an ongoing source of revenue. People sign up for your membership program to gain access to new content or training in a recurring fashion. The membership portal could include short recorded or live webinars and resources released on an ongoing and timely basis for your audience. This is an approach to consider implementing if you have a large library of content to pull from already, or if you have the ongoing content-development resources to support the recurring membership fee investment.

Evo: How are you doing this work in professional continuing ed right now?

BR: I was brought in to MUIH for the exciting challenge of launching our re-imagined professional and continuing education division, and I'm proud of the vast portfolio we've been able to offer with limited resources. We're still building and learning as we go, making quality improvements along the way. One of the first helpful things we did when I arrived was review the Quality Matters online course design standards to create a crosswalk between higher education and continuing professional education. We did a comparison of how they match up to create a learning framework for how PCE offerings compare to credit courses for the instructional design teams involved in the conversion.

I also work very closely with different faculty, subject matter experts and instructional designers to rethink the model and create course templates within our learning management system and provide them examples and templates to guide the course building process. As we piloted PCE courses, we developed guides for instructional designers to provide quality standards for adapting courses. While you don't want to wait to get started, I suggest creating a framework for the process rather than everyone going off on their own, which causes much confusion and an inferior end product.

My best advice is to identify what we refer to as "low-hanging fruit" opportunities and to start small and build from there. At first, we offered mini courses called masterclasses, which are very targeted topics ranging from one to six hours in length and can be completed entirely online and on-demand. Now, we're venturing into more advanced short courses, mentorship-based

courses, instructor-led cohort courses and hybrid courses. I'd like to establish a membership program and certification program as well. As a very small institution and unit, we were able to deliver a robust portfolio of content, which proves it can be done by anyone. Some of our content was new, but much of our most resource-effective content has originated from the unbundling of credit-bearing courses.

Evo: Is there anything you'd like to add about the value of creating crosswalks from credit-based offerings to non-credit offerings?

BR: We're still exploring the opportunity for internally transferring credit of these non-credit offerings to create stackable credentials. That's another complex discussion, but I do think that it's worth thinking about from the beginning, if you can. Today we're discussing unbundling credit to non-credit, but we can also reverse that approach to attract learners to matriculate into your academic programs. Depending on the course, if you have an audience who wants to pursue that option, you should capitalize on it and create a pathway and incentives for learners to progress to an advanced degree.

As a lifelong learner myself, I find it energizing to rethink education and consider the opportunity to offer educational experiences to anyone, anywhere at any time as a privilege. As the higher ed landscape becomes increasingly competitive, it's wise for institutions to remain nimble and adaptable, which is why unbundling credits to maximize and leverage resources to expand educational portfolios is a win-win for both institutions and learners of all ages.

This interview was edited for length and clarity.

Looking Ahead: Why Universities Need to Adopt the Credential Model

ANTHONY CARNEVALE
DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

The American education system has always valued the four-year education model, creating a stigma around two-year schools. But credentials are providing learners exactly what they need, fitting into the new learner lifecycle. Will universities get onboard? Anthony Carnevale discusses the importance of credentials, why they're overlooked and how continuing education divisions are the start of something new.

The EvoLLLution (Evo): Why do you think certificates and sub-baccalaureate credentials are overlooked by university leaders?

Anthony Carnevale (AC): The American higher education system has only recently moved beyond standard degree formats. Two-year schools were originally an alternative to the four-year schools. But in the minds of most citizens, the college system in America is a four-year college system. They see four-year schools as the high end of the business. There, you make more money from the four-year students. For students, they generally believe a four-year school will make them more money. This may be true, but is not always the case.

In today's world, 30 percent of people with associate degrees make more than people with bachelors.

A lot of certificates also make more than two-year degrees. This wasn't always true. Before the 80s, about 70 percent of good paying jobs didn't require anything more than high school education. After the 80s, the labor market shifted away from that. Jobs for those without a high school diploma declined, while jobs requiring a diploma increased. Job requirements began to spike, making any education beyond high school more valuable.

What's most striking about that change since then, is that people's field of study became a substitute value for the years of education. From an economic view, if a particular field of study sold better in the labor market, then choosing that field became very important. In the end, institutions began to move into this space of credentials and sub-baccalaureate in a big way. There's a bill on the hill now called the JOBS Act that's drawing a lot of criticism from higher education experts. The act wants Pell Grants for short-term programs, but the response from the education system, in part, is, "That's not what we're about. We're about issuing degrees." But that's not exactly true.

We're at the point where the sub-baccalaureate world is already growing larger than the baccalaureate world. More and more, we're trying

to build both a postsecondary-level education system and a training system. We're trying to build these systems that have a lot of choices in them, which is very disruptive.

So, the economy was able to change how we value knowledge and skill. The problem here is that the principal system we use to prepare people for work—workforce development—is the postsecondary education system. There's friction over the fact that we really don't have a training system, but there's a movement towards including more training within the education system.

> **Our model for the longest time was that you go and get an education, get a job and never return. That's less and less true now.**

Evo: What can be done to emphasize the values of different credentials to both prospective students and administrators of postsecondary institutions?

AC: What the government has been gradually working on, and what we're working on, is the change that's occurring underneath the larger questions of free college and a college with no debt. These are indicators that higher education is now a frontline issue in the American public dialogue.

Since the Bush administration, we've always had wage records which allow unemployment insurance systems to see if someone is eligible for unemployment insurance. Then, Obama expanded this dramatically by tying those wage records to student transcript data. So, we now have data all the way down to the program level. With President Trump's executive orders for all public and private institutions to report their data, we're building a system that is transparent and therefore hopefully accountable to the consumers (students, their families, etc.). So far, we've built about 80 percent directly into the higher education system.

The next trick is going to be getting institutions to use this data to tell their students what will happen to them if they take a particular field of study. They can't predict the future, but generally the evidence of graduates of the last five years can give us insight to; whether or not they got a job, how much they made, and how much progress they made in the labor market. Although it's not always a deciding factor, people still want to know. We issued a report a month or so ago on earning returns over time from 4,500 institutions. We got about 400,000 to 500,000 hits a day. But the big question is where's the counseling system that will use the data instead of relying on students to sort through this stuff by themselves.

Evo: Why is it important to expand access to sub-baccalaureate credentials?

AC: It will give people choices. They can decide to take a one-year certificate in heating, ventilation and air conditioning, go out in the labor market and make pretty good money, then go onto college. They can decide whether or not they want to get a two or four-year degree and at what kind of institution.

Students will find a great variation in earnings, returns, and employment attached to institutions and even more powerfully attached to programs. So, this offers choices and it does so in an era when nearly everyone has to make these choices now. Students need to be armed with information when they do choose where they want to go.

Evo: How viable is this stacking model in creating more access points to the university and more opportunities for learners to succeed?

AC: This will be even more important in the future because what we want in our education system is a set of relatively clear pathways — from the education you want, to a job in that field. That pathway may lead you through attending several institutions at different times. But we've not built these bridges and if anything, there are more roadblocks than bridges. What you want is a system of pathways that always moves you towards your education and career goals, and hopefully they overlap. All of this, along with a system of pathways that have a lot of exits and on-ramps that are clearly marked.

So, this is a work in progress. The American higher education system is of very a fragmented structure. Basically those 4,500 schools out there are institutions that are on their own. That is they all have a different business model, different target clientele, and there are very few pathways among them even in the public system.

Evo: What would you consider some of the levers that might compel a university leader to start shifting their institution in this more accessible and diverse credential direction?

AC: Well, we start out with a system that is very fragmented and resistant to change. When we look at the top colleges in America, they're selective to students based on their test scores and ability to afford high tuition costs. Now, if you are firmly established in that world, which the top few hundred are, your game is pretty well set. Why would you change? The answer is they won't.

So essentially what we're talking about is, they don't want to take students who've already been to another college. The first two years of a four-year college is where you make all your money because of the large class sizes. So having everyone at the school for four years builds this sense of community, especially with alumni. So, it's kind of a dynasty model, where past generations help pay for the current generation. They're not really interested in these kinds of changes.

Now if they're public, they may not have a choice because the government is beginning to push the public system to be more fluid as a system of education and career pathways. But there are tough issues there. Politically, we're gradually moving toward a system of free two-year colleges. If you tell the average American that everybody needs a four-year college degree nowadays, 60 percent or more will say they don't agree. But there's a sweet spot in this debate, which is pre-community college. That's what's happening pretty rapidly around the country to the extent where there's money to do it.

We're heading into a world where all these questions come up and people want more information for them to make decisions and negotiating these pathways, most of which don't exist at the moment. That's a whole other set of questions, but we're coming to the point where the students themselves are building an education and career pathway of their own. The problem is that the institutions they're dealing with aren't very user friendly.

Evo: What effect does continuing education divisions have on institutions to make this credential shift?

AC: Continuing ed divisions are the early signs of what will gradually become a lifelong learning system for the United States. Our model for the longest time was that you go and get an education, get a job and never return. That's less and less true now. There are large numbers of people who are going back to postsecondary institutions to get a certificate or to upskill. What we're trying to build is an education and training system that has this lifelong learning component to it. But what's happening is that people are trying to use current institutions for that purpose and it's not easy. They weren't built for that. So now we need to find ways to connect these institutions.

Evo: Is there anything you'd like to add about the importance of making certificates and associate's credentials more accessible?

AC: We're getting to the point where we have the information, the issue is in the public postsecondary system. Having information isn't useful if people don't know to convey it to their audience. You can simply put it on a website, but a lot of this information needs a counselor of some kind to help prospective students through the process of thinking about their education and career.

So, it's a system we haven't built yet, but the emerging problem is that there's a new stage in the life cycle for young people, where they won't get married and have a family until later in life. Institutions are used to the older way of life where people graduated high school, got a job, got married and then started a family all before the age of 25. This new lifecycle doesn't have the structure to support them.

This interview was edited for length and clarity.

Chaos Breeds Hope: Higher Ed's Opportunity in the New Normal

BENJAMIN AKANDE
PRESIDENT, CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE

The pandemic has opened eyes in higher education, but there needs to be continuous change to adapt to the new normal of learners' expectations for their education. Partly due to having an uncertainty the future ahead, learners want and need a flexible education that will meet their needs quickly and efficiently. Champlain College Online conducted a survey to see how people are feeling about the pandemic and higher ed. In this interview, Benjamin Akande discusses the pandemic's impact on adult learners, how to support learners as they change careers, and the importance of staying relevant in today's fast-changing market.

The EvoLLLution (Evo): What opportunities has the pandemic presented, both to institutions and to adult learners?

Benjamin Akande (BA): The uncertainty brought on by the pandemic has been challenging for everyone. And this is especially true for adult learners like Champlain College Online students. Many of them attend part-time and are balancing educating their children at home, doing their job or finding a new one, and school.

However, our research reveals there is a prevailing positive feeling most days. And we believe this is because the pandemic has encouraged everyone to reflect on what is important in their lives and prioritize it. For prospective adult students, it's about creating the opportunity—and perhaps the necessity—to look at one's work and ask: is it recession-proof? Can I see a future for myself here? And if the answer is no, how do I access training for a job that is? And how do I do it in real time?

What we're trying to do is to move our prospective students from living in a world of no to embracing the world of yes. We are the yes. And in essence, Champlain College Online's response has been to establish a number of career-focused certificates in areas like cybersecurity, project management, blockchain and data analytics because we know that there are jobs across the world in those fields. People want to re-skill quickly nowadays. The good news for place-bound adults is that more and more of these positions are now remote, so there's no need for them to pick up and move. They can continue to be functionally relevant wherever they are.

Evo: What are the characteristics of the traditional higher education environment that simply don't work when it comes to meeting the needs of adult learners?

BA: The first is the notion that they have to inconvenience their lives to attend your institution. That notion poses additional challenges on adult learners who are, in many cases, unable to relocate. How do you take out the distance in distance education? How do you bring that experience to them—an experience that is relevant, competitive, and that reflects what the market wants? That is the value added by Champlain College Online.

Our programs are market-relevant. We're not just talking about the present; we're looking ahead at what is coming and how our potential students can prepare themselves for that unseen future. We're their visual lens in doing that.

A lot of institutions still believe that students have to drop their lives, come to them and physically attend classes on a weekly basis. But we've introduced convenience. At the same time, we've also introduced futuristic assessment of where there are job openings, and what kind of skill sets are necessary to be relevant in that particular space.

Evo: What impact does student support services have on the adult student experience, especially for those looking for a career change?

BA: One thing I say to my team is to lead from where you are. It's important for people to have a sense of ownership over their place within an organization. Be the change. Don't look at the future as a destination but as what you create. By going back to school to upskill or re-skill, adult learners are kickstarting that process.

However, technical skills alone are often not enough. Today, more than ever, adult students need to walk away from their higher education knowing how to position themselves in a competitive job market, which requires much more than just having the appropriate skills.

This is why we partnered with executive career coach Jen Morris of Career Inspo. We took her proven Fast Start Formula career course—whose pillars are: get focused, get branded, get noticed, get hired—and built it into an on-demand, self-paced course for our students. Jen also facilitates live group job coaching sessions for them. Her process works and has proven to be very pivotal in our students' careers. We're also supporting our them through Wellbeing Wednesdays, a live webinar series we launched early on in the pandemic. It's hosted by our staff and faculty and features a variety of topics that aim to support our students in all aspects of their lives. Some of the recent topics that we've touched on include creating your personal brand, using the science of emotions to create healthy habits, and addressing equity and social justice using behavioral science.

We believe that fostering a culture of lifelong learning needs to happen from the inside out. My job is to encourage staff and faculty to develop themselves for the long haul and to encourage the same with our students and our employer partners.

Evo: Do you see an opportunity to scale career advising by taking this on-demand course approach, as opposed to relying on individual career advisors to provide that service?

BA: We know that in a course format, people are paying attention and that they have to retain what is provided to them. By doing it in a course format, you're continuing the educational process.

What we're saying is that these are fundamentals. These are critical requirements that you need to embed within your understanding and appreciation. That approach has proven to be very effective and extremely cogent to career development.

Evo: What can colleges do to better engage with employers to create more and better demand, and to ensure that skills gaps are being addressed during the education process?

BA: I'm fairly new to Champlain College, but my presidency started in July in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the reasons I chose Champlain was because of how truED and Champlain College Online are boldly reimagining workforce development. Also, we have a strong professional focus on education for both traditional-age and adult students. Through truED, we work with leading employers across the country to better understand their talent needs and to help students affordably develop their skills. We've built a talent pipeline from Champlain directly to employers.

Evo: In the survey results, 36% of respondents said they've developed new skills through free training options—how can institutions combat that affordability differentiator?

BA: We were intrigued by that statistic as well because we know that price can be a large barrier for adult students trying to make ends meet. It's one of the most insurmountable barriers out there, especially in this challenging time in our country. So, at Champlain College Online, we believe in supporting working adults by making high-quality education affordable.

In 2018, Champlain College Online made a bold move to reduce our undergraduate tuition by 50%. And our enrollment continues to grow in the aftermath—including in our degree programs and with shorter-term credentials. The biggest barriers to achieving or embracing an educational credential are usually time and affordability. We believe that by taking the affordability issue off the table and giving students access to great education, we meet our mission as an institution. Most importantly, we enable adult learners to get where they want to be. And we've found real value in doing that.

Evo: How important is it for non-degree education to stay relevant to the evolving needs of adult students, especially in a very fast changing job market?

BA: After I earned my PhD years ago, someone said to me, "I guess you're done with learning now." That was five years after I received that PhD, and my response to them was that I was learning far more after getting that degree than when I was pursuing it.

A non-degree education is important, both to adult learners and employers. It's one of the reasons we have been intentionally expanding our portfolio in that area with our employer partners. At the same time, there's very limited data on the ROI of non-degree education, but there's a considerable amount of research conducted each year on the value of a bachelor's degree, for example. We really believe and see value in developing long-term credentials like communication, adaptability, problem solving, problem finding and technical skills.

Evo: What do you think needs to happen to create more opportunities for those pursuing traditional degrees to also pursue some certificates that are going to support their employability? How do we provide learners access to a more well-rounded education?

BA: We believe that fostering a culture of lifelong learning needs to happen from the inside out. My job is to encourage staff and faculty to develop themselves for the long haul and to encourage the same with our students and our employer partners.

We need to emphasize that learning doesn't end when the first program is completed or the degree is conferred. We have to reiterate that message repeatedly in our informal and formal communications—like alumni newsletters or advising sessions. We also need to continue developing a portfolio that gives people a reason to come back to our college, ne that gives them on-demand skills that employers require. Yeats said it best: an education is not the filling of the pail, but the lighting of the fire. Our job is to keep that fire going with relevant programming and market-sensitive skill development that essentially position our students not just for the present but also for the distant future.

This interview was edited for length and clarity.

CREDENTIALS

The Rising Urgency for Non-Degree Credential Quality Standards

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic and unprecedented impact on education and work. By early May, the unemployment rate was nearing 15%, and students at colleges and universities around the country were finishing up their semesters remotely. Life has certainly changed for all Americans in a drastic way. As we start to think about what happens when the country awakens from this economic coma, education and training may become an important pathway back into the labor market.

During a recession, there is often a surge in attention to and enrollment in traditional higher education, but will that be the response this time around? The mounting financial pressures of student debt and emerging skepticism about the value of higher education, combined with the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression could prompt more students to seek out cheaper and faster alternatives to a college degree. Dislocated workers might also begin to look for quick, less expensive paths back to employment. Non-degree credentials may be part of the answer.

While non-degree credentials were of great interest prior to the pandemic, they might be even more important post-recession for workers and students, post-secondary education providers and policy makers and states. As a result, systems and approaches to measuring and ensuring quality of non-degree credentials are more important now than ever. Non-degree credentials include certifications, occupational licensure and apprenticeships, as well as badges and other newly emerging micro-credentials.

Prior to this downturn, over one quarter of U.S. adults already had some type of non-degree credential, according to data from the National Center for Educational Statistics[i]. There are over 300,000 non-degree credentials in the marketplace, offered by a wide range of organizations including educational institutions, private training providers, industry associations and unions.[ii]

The non-degree credential marketplace currently operates with no standard for assessing quality, and as a result, there is a great deal of confusion as to what makes a quality credential and how consumers can tell. Learners invest significant time and money in non-degree credentials, so it is important that they know what they are buying and what will give them the biggest return on investment by providing an educational pathway and another one into the

labor market. There is thus greater urgency for states and institutions to establish a coherent approach to ensuring non-degree credential quality and making sure people know about it.

To guide these efforts, we at Rutgers University's Education and Employment Research Center developed a framework to guide thinking about the quality of non-degree credentials based on four key components. This framework can be used by institutions and policy makers as they think about how to create a high-quality system and/or policy around non-degree credentials.

Define through design

Credential design encompasses the attributes that define the credential in terms of its content, how it is attained, and how it can be used—factors usually decided by the credential grantor. These attributes can be measured through the credential itself and include the relevance of its competencies for career and educational goals; appropriateness of the instructional processes and/or assessment processes; the degree to which the credential is stackable and portable; the degree of transparency about the credential and its contents; and the accessibility and affordability of the credential. Taken together, these factors provide an indication of whether a credential has a quality design.

Knowledge and skills

Beyond the design of a credential are the demonstrated competencies or skills and knowledge that the individual credential holder possesses after attaining the credential. This component of quality refers to the measurement of the actual competencies the individual credential holder possesses, as opposed to competencies the credential intends to convey as outlined by the credential design.

Market recognition

Quality credentials must have recognition on the market. Another component of quality are the market processes through which a credential comes to be recognized and have currency in the world, based on the competencies it marks. This includes transparency initiatives that convey information on the credential; general awareness of the credential and its grantor; endorsements and validations by trusted organizations; state regulations that require

its use; employer hiring policies and practices where it is preferred or required for hiring; and educational institutions' recognition of learning that recognize and translate its value into academic credit. These market processes are often overlooked but are essential to the review, assurance and promotion of quality credentials.

Learner outcomes

Outcomes of value are the tangible benefits to possessing the credential for individuals and society. For individuals, these include a range of educational, employment and social outcomes, such as the traditional path of students continuing with their education, becoming employed, having increased earnings and accruing better health and well-being. For society, these include both outcomes for employers such as more efficient hiring, better retention of workers and greater diversity in their workforce, and outcomes for society at large such as, improved public safety and reduced inequality.

Together, these four components form a comprehensive approach for understanding and ensuring quality among non-degree credentials. Policymakers and practitioners can use this framework to guide current efforts to review existing non-degree credential offerings and carefully consider which are of high quality and which may need to be improved. While more data are needed to fully assess non-degree credentials across these components, efforts are beginning to make more information available, and these efforts are necessary to advancing. Conversations about quality can begin to push forward the movement to tame the academic wild west and, in doing so, provide greater clarity to learners about where to best invest their time and money. In the post-COVID pandemic world, providing this guidance and clarity is a more of an imperative than ever.

Boosting Non-Credit Revenues by Consolidating Non-Credit Administration

NICOLE WESTRICK
ASSOCIATE VICE PROVOST, TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

With declining operational budgets and increasing demand for labor-market responsive offerings, non-credit programs have become increasingly important to colleges and universities across the country. Of course, after decades of existing at the fringes of the institution, the administration of these programs rarely matches their current importance and, unfortunately, does not position them to fully realize their potential. In this interview, Nicole Westrick reflects on the process of consolidating the administration of non-credit offerings at Temple University and shares her insights on how this consolidation process has benefited individual divisions and the institution itself.

The EvoLLLution (Evo): What were some of the factors that led to the decision at Temple to consolidate the administration of non-credit offerings?

Nicole Westrick (NW): The consolidation of non-credit administration was driven by several factors. The first factor was the lack of online registration and payment for all of the non-credit programs. Many were still using paper registration processes and handling significant amounts of physical cash.

The second factor was the challenges and opportunities around cash handling and compliance with university policies and procedures. The decision to select a single system that would be used university-wide was strongly influenced by compliance issues.

The final factor was revenue-based. Some of these individual programs were quite large and could afford to support their own system and administration, but other units were smaller and their profit margins more narrow. The university saw this as an opportunity to make an investment in innovation and entrepreneurship at the divisional level. That's why we chose a single solution that could be managed centrally but allowed the individual units the flexibility to create, develop, and run their programs.

Evo: How was this consolidation put into practice? Was it a top-down process or did it require champions at all levels?

NW: It's an interesting process that, frankly, was paved with a number of misses from a technology perspective that led to a successful software implementation. I was hired by Temple University in June 2012 to implement a system that had already been purchased by the university to manage the administration of all Temple's non-credit programs. This system was heavily dependent on the business rules defined by our credit programs. As part of that process, we learned two things. First, many of the credit processes were incompatible for the non-credit programs. Second, we learned that a number of programs were hidden and embedded deep into individual units. In truth, we simply didn't have an understanding of the

real landscape of non-credit and continuing education offerings at the university. In many ways, the original system was forcing a round peg into a square hole.

Within six months of being at the university I had to tell the CIO that current software would require a significant capital investment in order to actually work for non-credit and continuing education offerings. Thankfully, I was given the green light to find what other products were available. From there we did an extensive market analysis, which included business requirement gathering from each non-credit offering unit. We sat down with each and every non-credit unit, in their physical offices, to see their catalog and talk about their business practices.

We spent a significant amount of time doing business analysis to understand how each of these units operate. What we found was that, while they said they were very different and distinct from one-another, there were a number commonalities shared across all these units. So, as we moved into the new system, we spent a lot of time focusing on those shared characteristics and the common practices. Most importantly, we focused on shared pain points that many of the units were experiencing. This allowed us to frame the solving of the most significant pain points as a win and allowed us to more seamlessly move to centralized operations for our system implementation.

One other thing was that we consistently exceeded the non-credit units' expectations. We really focused on under-promising and over-delivering. The CE Systems team viewed the non-credit units as our customers and our goal was to delight them with our service and solutions delivery.

Evo: How was the decision and process of consolidation communicated to staff and faculty across the institution?

NW: I am a huge believer in face-to-face conversation so I spent a lot of time going between the campuses and meeting with the individual unit directors. We presented multiple times at our Council of Deans meetings and Faculty Senate. We also spent time talking to associate and assistant deans across the university.

We fostered an open door environment, where we encouraged our colleagues to come to us and bring us any problem, so we could figure out how to solve it. We eventually became known as the problem solvers across the university.

This consolidation was further supported at the Provost level through several policies that required all non-credit continuing education programs be run through the university central system. That said, the schools and colleges got to benefit by not being "taxed." This is to say, by shifting to the central system they would not have to pay allocated costs on non-credit revenue. Allocated costs are like a tax and are a fixture of the Responsibility Centered Management model of budgeting. This provided a big motivator to go through a central system, so each unit could recognize the full value of their non-credit revenue without having to pay a tax, or an allocated cost, on it.

Evo: What led to that concession from central administration to allow individual departments to maintain the majority of their non-credit revenue in exchange for moving to that centralized system?

NW: It was the vision of the Provost to foster an environment across the university that was based on entrepreneurship and innovation. This allowed the units to move past focusing on only doing things that would guarantee short term-success. It meant that units could be responsive to the market as well as the needs of students and the education needs across the region.

Now, they can build something and try it and the worse-case scenario is just losing expenses; they would not also have to pay the tax and start out with a negative balance just by trying something.

Evo: What was the initial response from staff and faculty—especially from those larger faculties that could afford a system to manage their own non-credit offerings—to this consolidation?

NW: We were solving the problems that these larger units, even though they could afford their own system, couldn't address with the system they had in place or that they were thinking about purchasing.

For example, we had a unit that had extensive requirements from our internal audit department around cash handling, because of the system they were using and the way security, roles and responsibilities were divided. As a result, they had one staff person whose time and energy was largely focused on making sure that they were in compliance with their cash handling processes. We told that unit that the central system we were looking at handled that administrative function, so the person who was otherwise spending their time focused on the

cash handling processes could instead spend their time focusing on the things that really matter at the program level, which is program development, marketing and curriculum management.

When you focus on three things—program development, marketing and curriculum—you really can sell a central system because you're taking important tasks that can be done by anyone off their hands, and leaving program-specific staff member to focus on unique differentiators and high-value work.

Evo: With the system having now been rolled out, how has the consolidated administration of non-credit offerings been received?

NW: Universally, the consolidated administrative system has been received really positively. There's not a day that goes by that we don't learn about some benefit that a program has seen.

For example, we recently we had a unit host a conference attended by several hundred people and, in the conference program, they acknowledged the continuing education system team and one of our student workers who helped support and set up the conference using the non-credit system. The fact that a school or college recognizes their systems people speaks volumes about the way that we've been able to build that relationship and the impact the system itself has had.

Now, teams from our various colleges and schools come to us for help with things they're trying to do. We're seen as a solutions provider, not just technologists. We're always coming up with new ways for them to expand their business or increase their revenues.

Evo: What were some of the major roadblocks to gaining buy-in across the institution for this consolidated administration system?

NW: I think the biggest roadblock we faced was the history of over 40 years of attempts to create a centralized continuing education and non-credit system. The advantage I had was coming in from outside the university. In some ways, I didn't really understand that what we were doing had not been historically possible. I just thought about the problem differently and focused on building relationships and creating this culture and environment of trust, which led people to want to work with us. I saw how we could help them improve and grow their businesses.

Evo: What kind of impact has central system administration made to revenue-generation in the non-credit space?

NW: In our first full year with the system, which was last year, our revenue was $9.6 million. This year, we're on target for over 30 percent growth and fully anticipate $12 million in revenue.

It makes sense because we're helping people shift their focus from administrative work to the things that really matter: program development, marketing and curriculum.

Evo: What advice would you share with other institutional leaders looking to consolidate their non-credit offerings?

NW: I would suggest any leader trying to move in this direction focus on each unit independently. Take a "one unit at a time" approach to really understand how each unit does business and why they do business in that particular way. After completing this process, take it back a level— move from the micro to the macro level—where you're looking at commonalities across the units. At the macro level, you're really promoting a shared experience that everyone will have and benefit from.

If there's one big takeaway from shifting to a centralized single system for university, it's to avoid customizations and really focus on building each unit's business processes so they align with the system, rather than building a system to align with your current business process.

Evo: Why is it valuable to build business processes to fit the system, rather than building a system to fit existing business processes?

NW: By adapting business processes, you're really focusing on the system and its capabilities. Making business processes map to the system really allows you to achieve that true centralization and consolidation university-wide.

If you're building small customizations for each program, you will end up making a larger investment in a system, even though people's existing business processes are in place because they were conceived around whatever tools they had available at the time. As you move to a new tool or a new system, you should be rebuilding your business processes, not rebuilding the system. After all, the system will eventually change and your business processes are the most flexible part of your organization.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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