

Shifting Paradigms:

Understanding Institutional Perspectives on Microcredentialing

A Needs Assessment Surrounding New Credentials



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Shifting Paradigms: Understanding Institutional Perspectives on Microcredentialing

A Needs Assessment Surrounding New Credentials

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Introduction

The Current State of Higher Education

Like many sectors, higher education experienced a tremendous amount of turbulence over the last year due to COVID 19. However, many of the cracks that are now becoming chasms were visible well ahead of the pandemic. The global marketplace is shifting more rapidly toward a new economy. This swift acceleration has created a serious challenge for institutions to continue to educate the workforce as traditional models of higher education struggle to adapt to the rapid pace of modern demand. The new currency of learning will no longer be measured exclusively through degrees and credit offerings, but rather through demonstrated skills and competencies completed through more stackable pathways of higher education.

For many higher education institutions in financial peril, having previously delayed financial collapse through the rapid adoption of online degrees, new models for educating the workforce are needed. These models will need to be better aligned with the needs of employers, as well as be nimbler and more flexible to rapid growth and changing technologies.

Motivation for the Research

UPCEA and The EvoLLLution believe this research is coming at a critical juncture for higher education. Institutions are often struggling to stay above water. As an industry, we must reevaluate the model of higher education that has codified over the last few decades. Microcredentials will be paramount for the future success and long-term viability of institutions. The rapid shift toward a new economy, as well as the habits and purchasing preferences of Millennials and Generation Z, means that institutions must create additional currencies of learning. While many institutions understand the necessity of this shift, few have an appropriate sense of urgency, and even fewer have developed the processes and procedures necessary for microcredential development.

The purpose of this research is to better inform the higher education community about the needs of institutions regarding new credentials in an effort to help them develop programs that will be valued by both students and employers, mitigate internal hurdles surrounding new program development, and illustrate potential best practices.

UPCEA & The EvoLLLution New Credential Needs Assessment Survey, 2021

Survey Methodology

Between May 5 and 13, 2021, UPCEA and The EvoLLLution invited their respective deduplicated institutional members to participate in the study with a total of 606 individual survey respondents. It is important to note that multiple individuals from the same institution could participate in the study, though the majority of respondents did not fit this category. The sample for the study is not random, as the membership lists of both organizations were used. However, if the assumption was made that the membership of both organizations represented the professional, continuing and online education units for higher education in North America, then the margin of error would be plus or minus 3% at 95% confidence.

Study Findings

Compared to prior UPCEA research, institutions appear to be more engaged in new credential initiatives. Figure 1 below details how involved survey respondents were with the process of developing and implementing new credential initiatives at their institution. Fifty percent of respondents were extremely (27%) or very involved (23%) in the process of developing and implementing new credential initiatives at their institution.

FIGURE 1: INVOLVEMENT IN NEW CREDENTIAL PROCESSES (N=604)





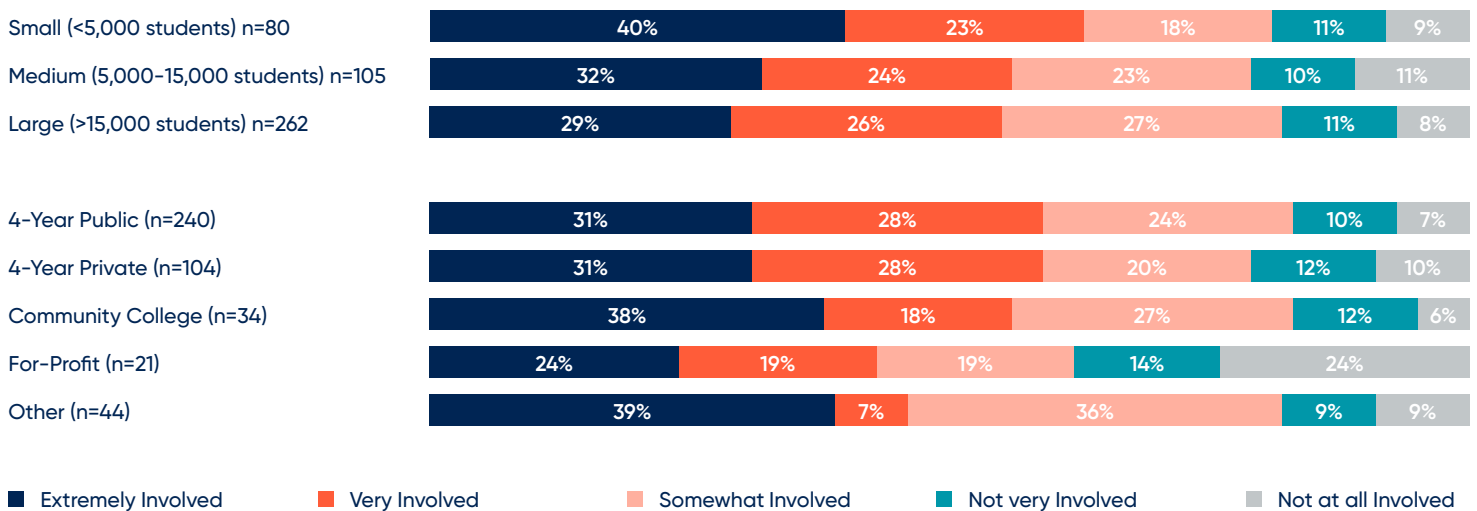
“Students and employers are demanding a new approach to postsecondary education. These pressures have created an environment in which alternative postsecondary options are abundant, the relevance of the degree is continually questioned, and students still get lost in deciding between a traditional and a non-traditional educational pathway.”

Karen Ferguson | Provost, Colorado State University-Global Campus



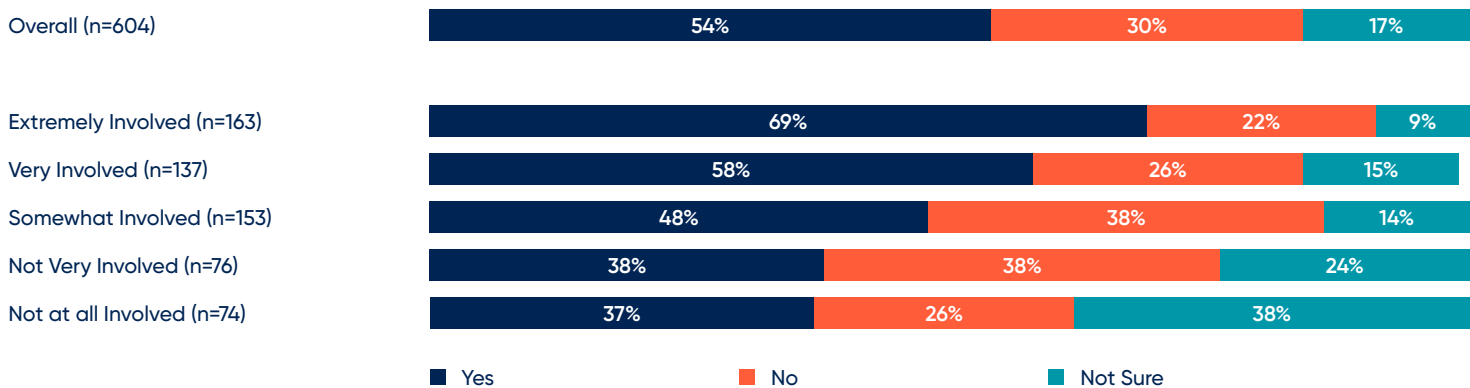
Regardless of size or type of institutions, new credentials are becoming more prevalent in higher education. Figure 2 shows involvement in new credential processes by institution size and type. Approximately 59% of respondents from both 4-year public and 4-year private institutions said they were extremely (31%) or very involved (28%) in their institution's process of developing and implementing new credential initiatives. Respondents from small institutions were most likely to be extremely involved (40%).

FIGURE 2: INVOLVEMENT IN NEW CREDENTIAL PROCESSES BY INSTITUTION SIZE & TYPE



Over fifty percent of respondents (54%) felt their institution has embraced credentialing initiatives. Nearly a third of respondents (30%) felt their institution has not done so. Those who were more involved in the process of developing credentials were more likely to say their institution has embraced credentialing initiatives.

FIGURE 3: EMBRACING CREDENTIAL INITIATIVES



Larger institutions are more likely to have more experience or the benefit of more time offering new credentials with smaller institutions following their progress. Respondents from large institutions were more likely to say their institution has embraced credentialing initiatives.



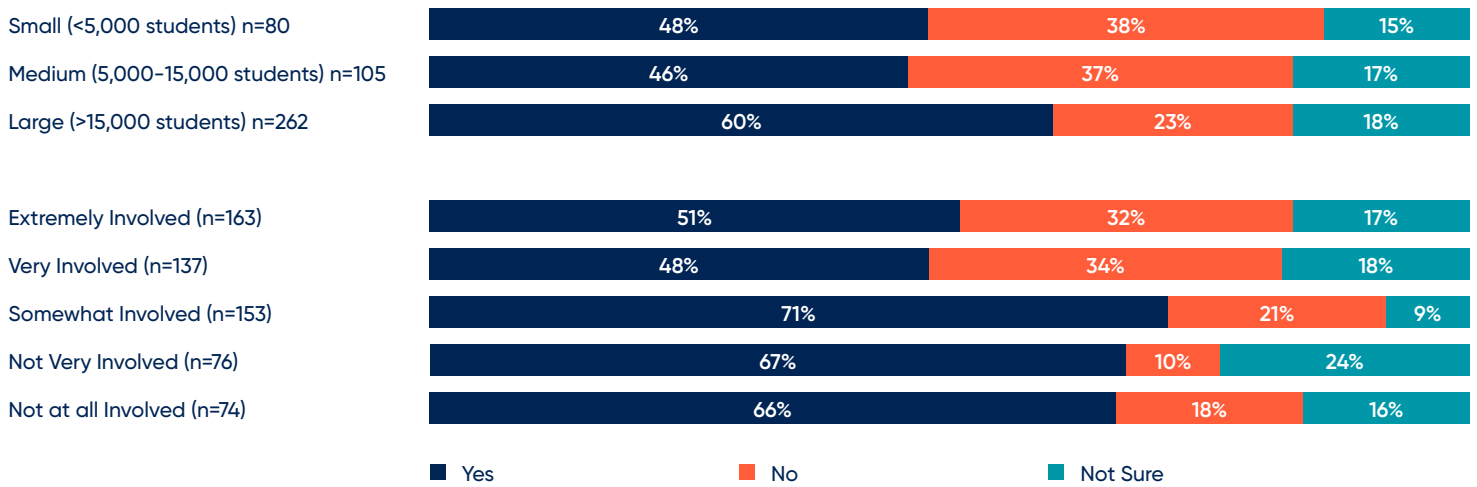
“Non-degree educational credentials were so often positioned as alternatives to degrees—as disruptors. But this moment may show us how complementary non-degree credentials can be, creating pathways to degrees, and yes, sometimes alternatives to them.”

Sean Gallagher | Executive Director of the Center for the Future of Higher Education and Talent Strategy, Northeastern University



Community colleges, for-profit, and other institutions are more likely to embrace credentialing initiatives than 4-year public or private institutions, most likely as a result of a more challenging economic situation.

FIGURE 4: EMBRACING CREDENTIAL INITIATIVES BY INSTITUTION SIZE & TYPE



There are many reasons why institutions have embraced new credential offerings. Respondents who said their institution was embracing credential initiatives most often cited having discussions, considering, or working towards initiatives. Those who said their institution has not done so said that they were not prioritized, planned, embraced, discussed, or acted upon. However, many also said that while their institution has not embraced credentialing initiatives, they were working toward or having discussions around them. These responses highlight the reality that institutions of all types are struggling with the infrastructure and support needed for non-degree credentials. Additionally, many faculty and administrators are not interested in or are hostile towards non-degree credentials, citing intra-institutional competition, questionable quality, and a general lack of understanding or trend acknowledgment. Respondents were able to provide multiple responses.



“While many of our institutions are moving toward this type of “micro to macro” vision, it is easy to talk about and very hard to implement. Policies stand in the way (those can be changed); the pace of academic governance slows down new, relevant programs (that can be changed); and the cultural identity of an institution can inhibit this evolution (that can be transformed). All of those elements are very difficult to change, and each are contextualized differently in colleges and universities.”

A. Sasha Thackaberry | Vice President for Online and Continuing Education, Louisiana State University



FIGURE 5: REASON FOR EMBRACE OF INITIATIVES RESPONSE	(n=276)	(n=164)	(n=84)
	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Embraced/part of mission, vision, or strategy	21%	2%	4%
Working toward/having discussions/considering	48%	29%	24%
Not sure how to move forward	1%	5%	1%
Have existing offerings	38%	3%	11%
Resistance on campus (faculty, administration, college, etc.)/lack of support	1%	22%	12%
No initiatives/don't offer microcredentials	ND	6%	ND
Not prioritized, planned, embraced, or acted upon	1%	33%	6%
Varies by department/school; not institution wide	0%	2%	17%
Focus on traditional learners/programs	0%	8%	1%
Other	12%	17%	12%
Don't know	ND	1%	31%



“Microcredentials present a better way to connect with people over the lifetime of their learning cycle. It’s a better way to adapt our curriculum to a fast-changing market.”

Marc Austin | Executive Director of Professional Education and Academic Ventures, George Mason University



Many institutions offering new credentials have responded to the needs of employers. Figure 6 details the reasons for developing new credentials. Almost half of respondents (46%) believe keeping up with the industry/market demand influenced the institution to consider developing a new credential, which indicates a reactive response to new credential development rather than a proactive one. Respondents were coded for multiple responses.

FIGURE 6: REASON FOR DEVELOPMENT OF NEW CREDENTIALS (N=506)

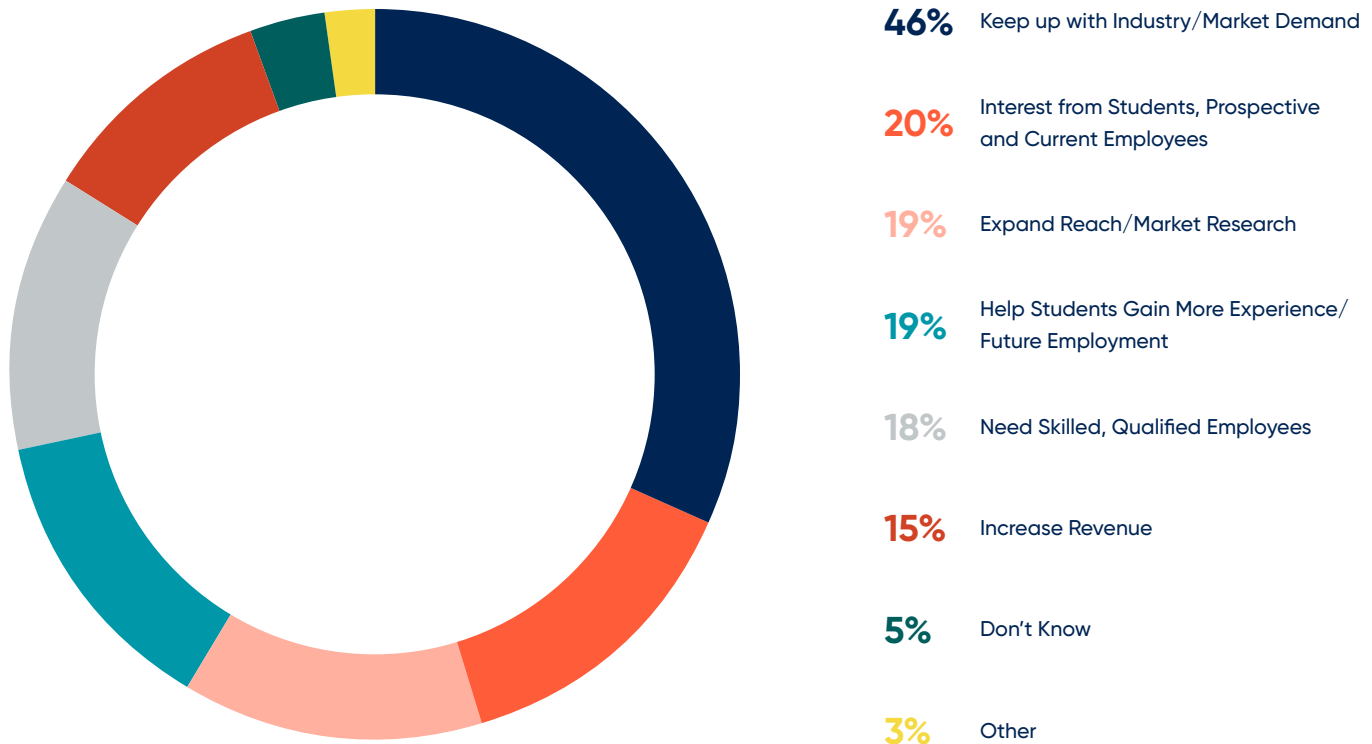
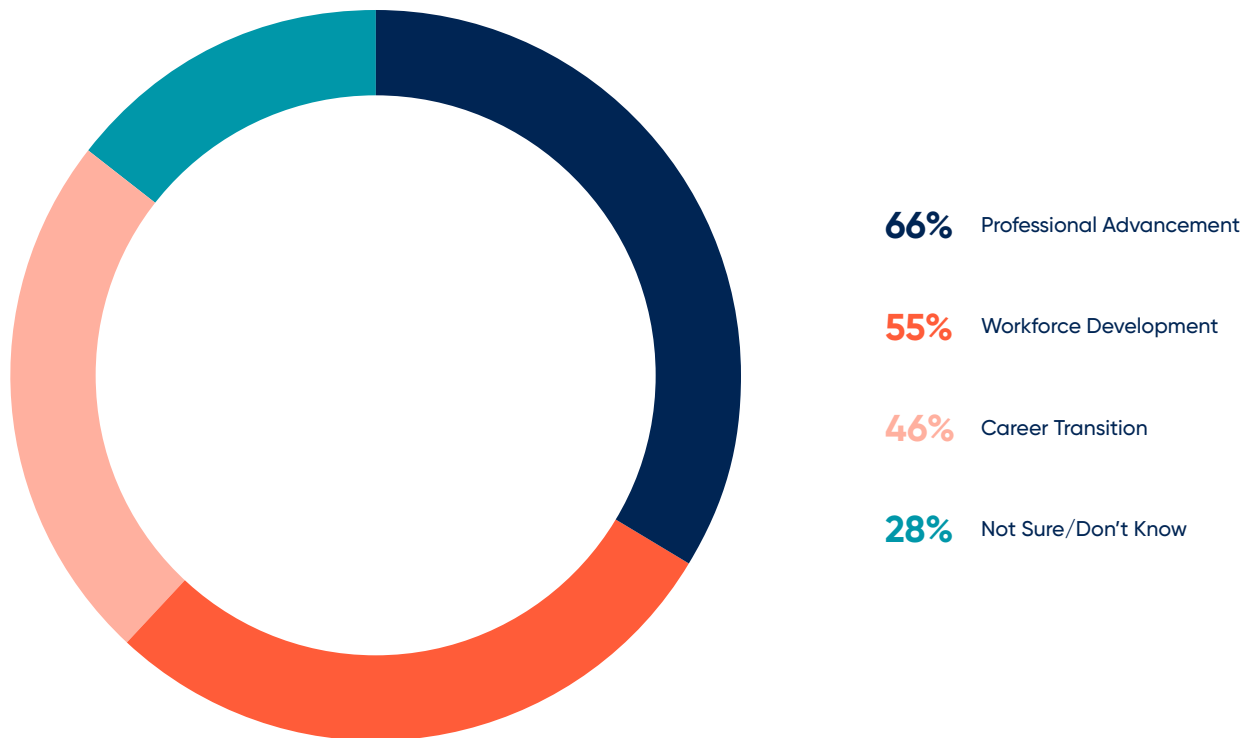


Figure 7 shows the different target audiences for microcredentials. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) said their institution is designing microcredentials for professional advancement, while 55% said workforce development.

FIGURE 7: MICROCREDENTIAL TARGET AUDIENCE (N=589)



“

“As the workforce changes and new types of jobs are created, we need nimble learning opportunities to help people upskill and reskill throughout their lives.”

Claire Sullivan | Assistant Vice Chancellor for Innovation in Digital Badges and Microcredentials, University of Maine System

”

Informing Microcredential Development

Institutions of higher education are using more external sources of information to drive their new credential initiatives. Figure 8 displays the importance of these sources. Labor and occupational data was seen as the most important information source when considering developing new credentials (42% extremely important), closely followed by local employers (41% extremely important), and national employer trends (35% extremely important).

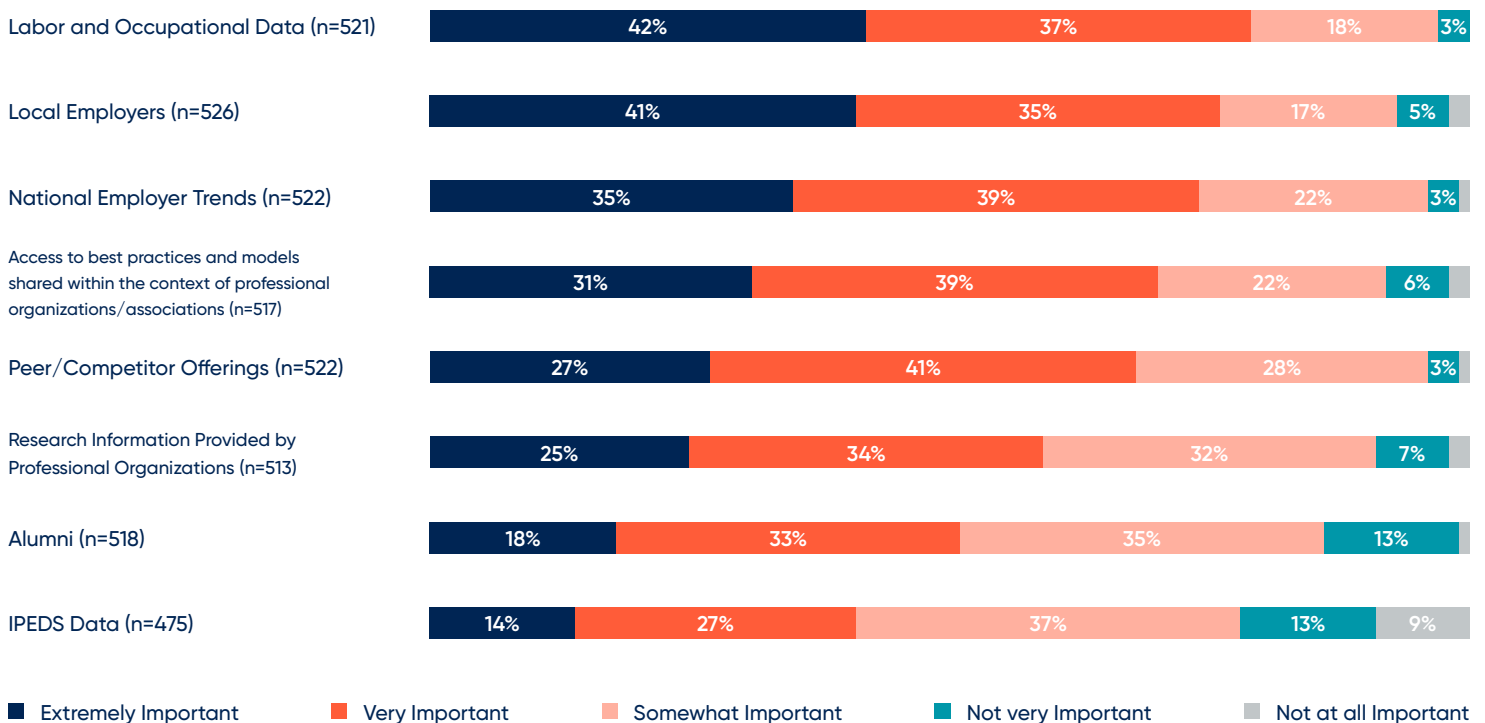


“It’s about meeting the needs of our students, of our employers, and ultimately supporting the economic development of our society. We need to think beyond standalone programs and instead sell an ecosystem of integrated lifelong learning programs.”

Tracey Taylor O’Reilly | Assistant Vice President of Continuing Studies, York University

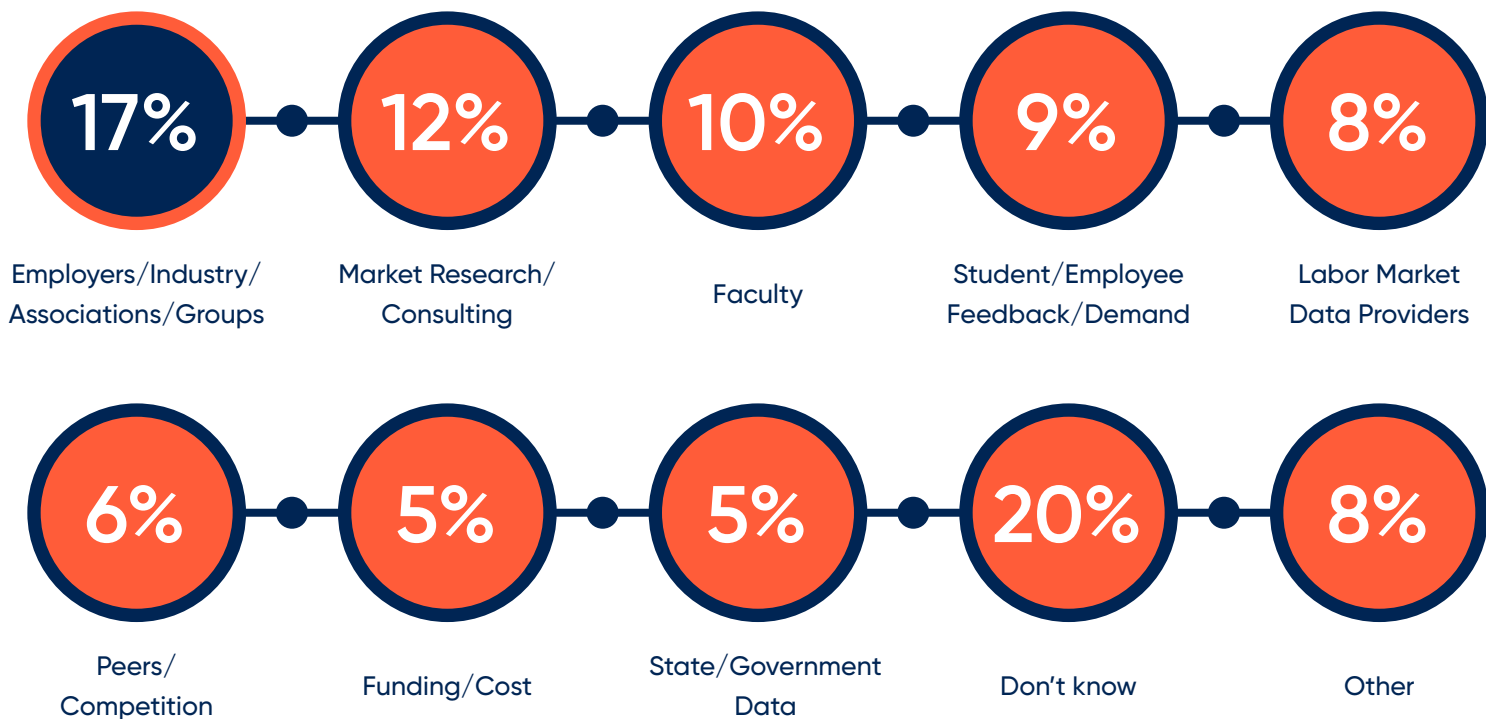


FIGURE 8: IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION SOURCES



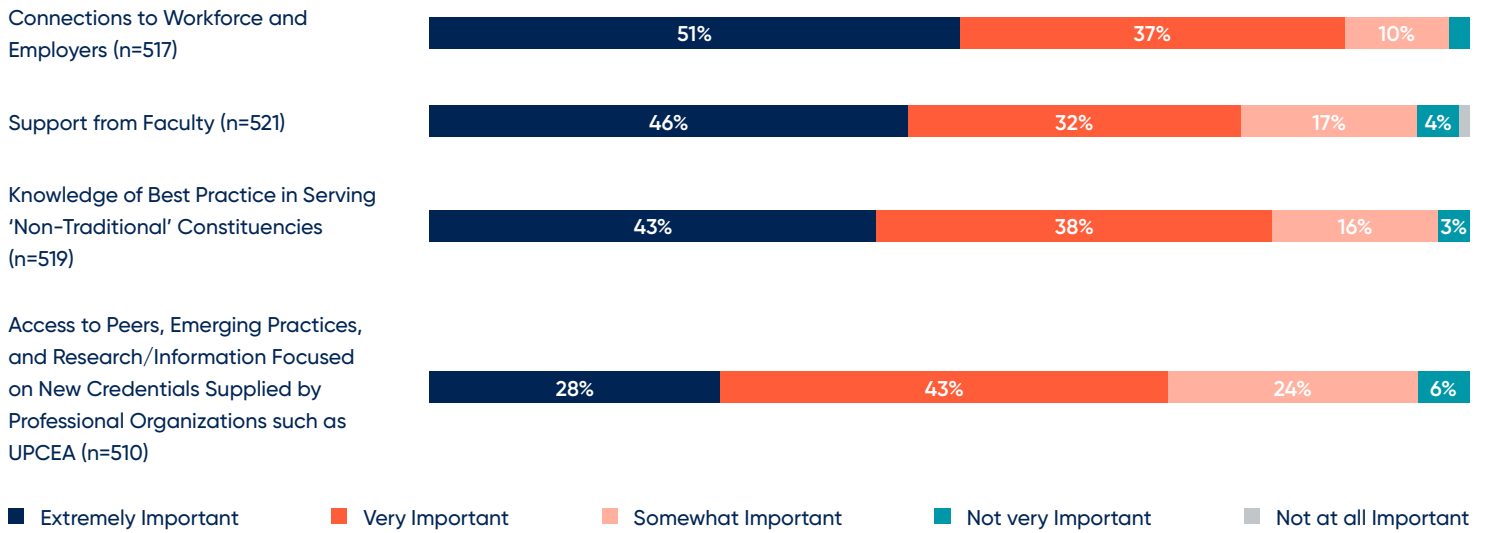
External sources of information have more influence than internal stakeholders when it comes to decision making. Figure 9 highlights these additional information sources. Seventeen percent (17%) of respondents believe that employers, industry, associations, and groups are other important sources the institutional leaders utilize when creating new credentials.

FIGURE 9: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SOURCES (N=202)



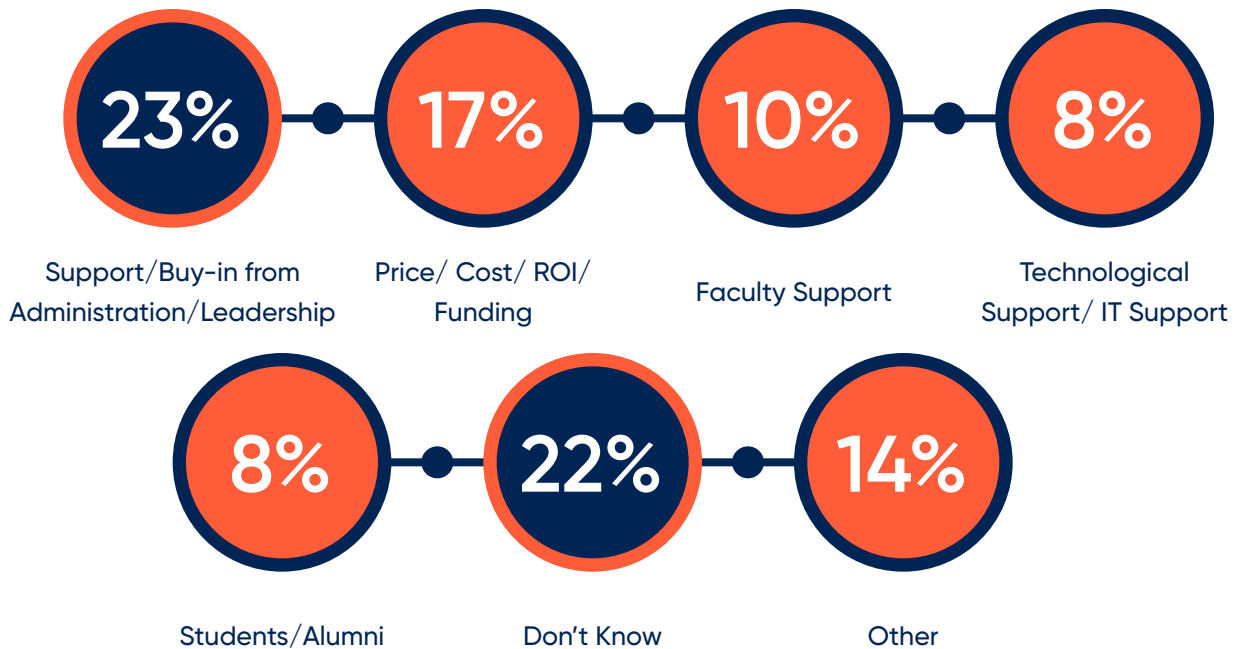
In the past, institutions of higher education could be criticized for being too focused on degrees and internal processes. The pendulum appears to have shifted as most institutions cite connections to the workforce and employers at a higher rate than support from faculty. Figure 10 displays the importance of various items/actions of new credential initiatives. Connections to the workforce and employers (51% extremely important) were seen as the most important item/action for the support, development, and delivery of new credentials. Access to peers, emerging practices, and research/information focused on new credentials supplied by professional organizations such as UPCEA were seen as least important but were still considered extremely (28%) or very important (43%) by nearly three-quarters of respondents (71%).

FIGURE 10: SUPPORT, DEVELOPMENT, AND DELIVERY IMPORTANCE



It is likely that the economic fragility of the institution or the preemptive need to innovate is fueling new credential advances. Figure 11 details other important items/actions of new credential initiatives that are not previously listed. Twenty-three percent (23%) of respondents said that support/buy-in from administration/leadership is the most important factor in support of the development and delivery of new credential initiatives. However, 22% said they did not know.

FIGURE 11: ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF CREDENTIAL SUPPORT (N=115)



Quality Assurance

In a traditional higher education environment, one that has been degree-dependent, quality was often assessed by accreditors, faculty or review committees. For new credentials, the role of employers plays a critical function.

Figure 12 shows the importance of various methods or avenues in determining quality. While endorsements by employers had the highest percentage of respondents who found that item/ action extremely important (43%), the reputation of the credential-granting entity had the highest combined percentage of extremely and very important (89%).

FIGURE 12: METHODS OR AVENUES OF DETERMINING QUALITY

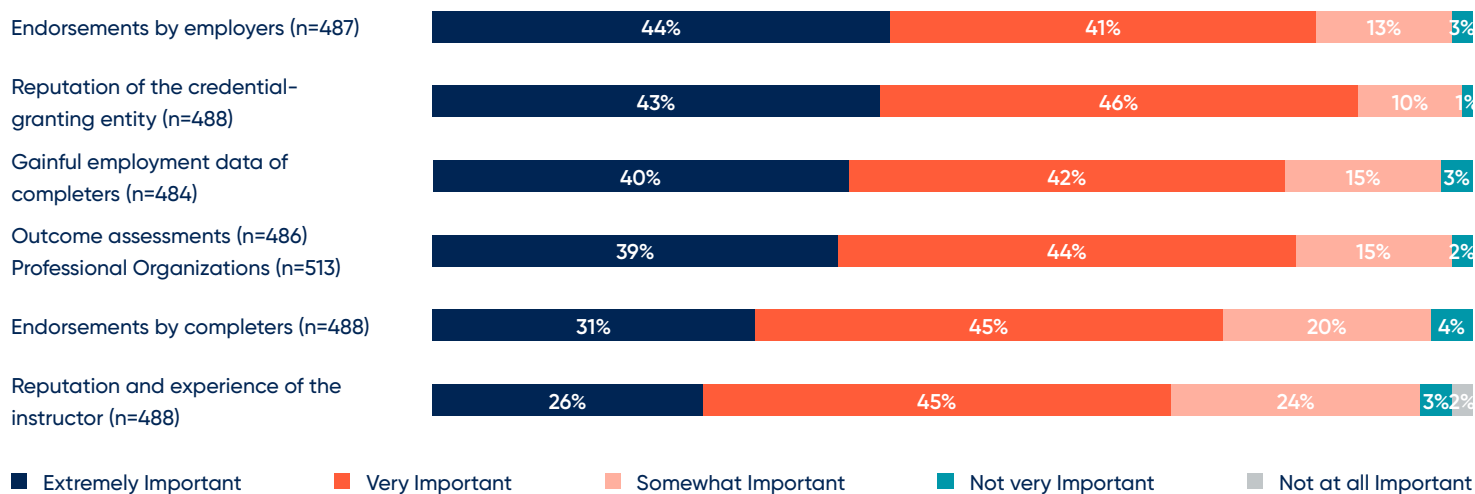
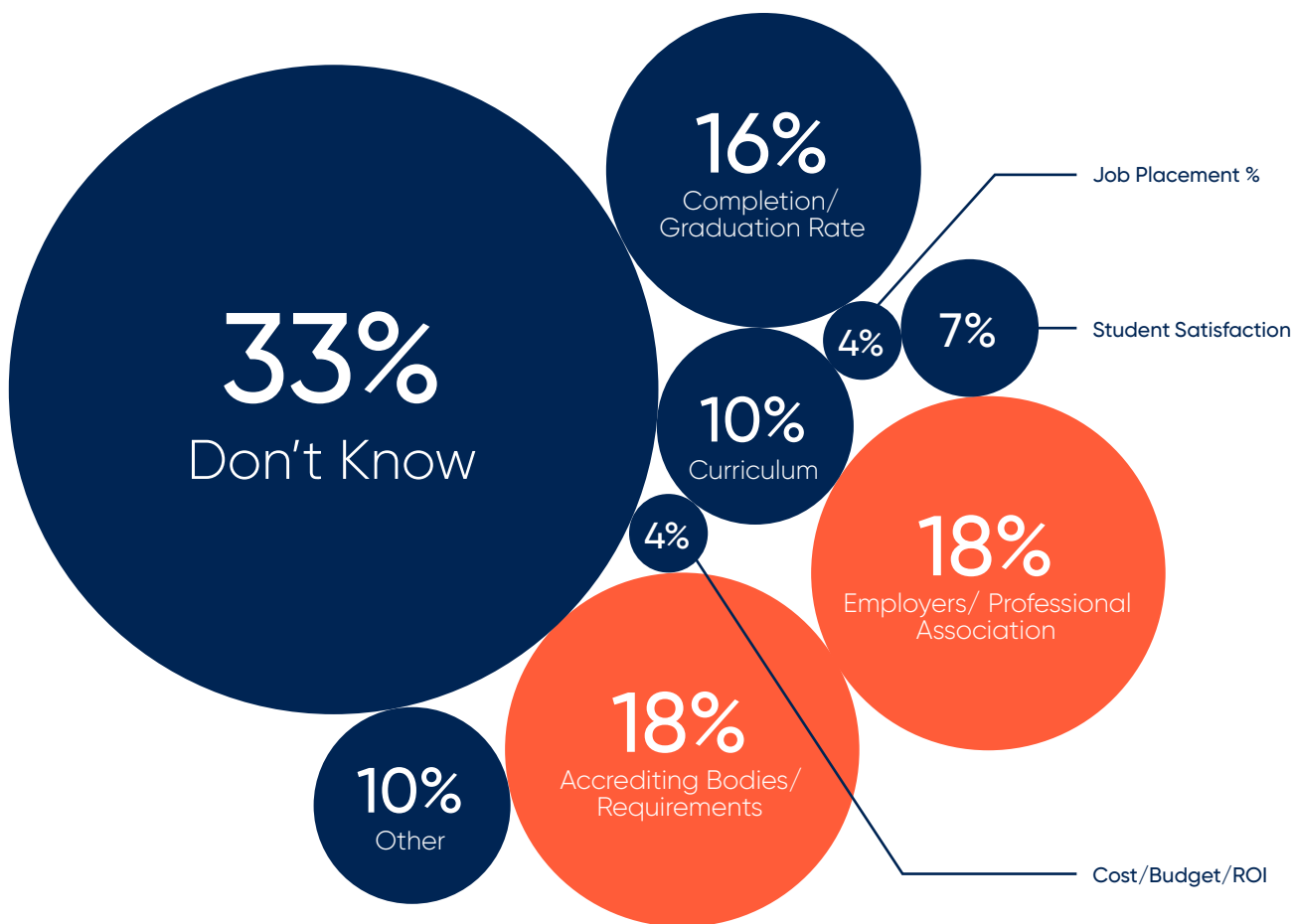


Figure 13 displays other important methods or avenues in determining quality that have not previously been listed. Respondents also noted employers/professional associations (18%) and accrediting bodies/requirements (18%) as important methods or avenues for determining the quality of credential programs. This suggests that the recognition of value by both employers and job seekers is critical, as is the independent evaluation of a microcredential's required assessment.

FIGURE 13: ADDITIONAL METHODS FOR DETERMINING QUALITY (N=67)



Microcredentials as a Competitive Differentiator

Many institutions see new credentials as critical to their future. Nearly 40% of respondents felt that new, alternative, or microcredentials were extremely (8%) or very (31%) effective at competing with emerging entities in the education market, such as bootcamps. Individuals who feel their institution has embraced credentialing initiatives were more likely to say these credentials were extremely or very effective (43%), compared to those who feel their institution has not (32%).

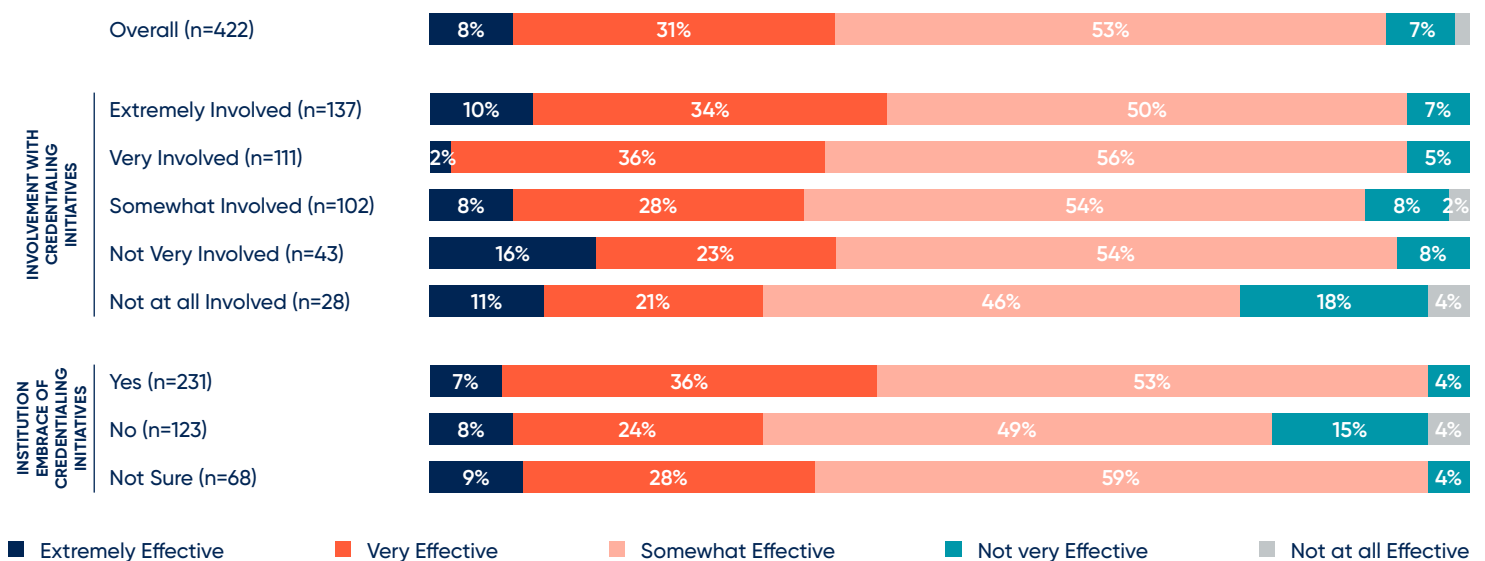


“The creation of shorter forms of education is critical for the non-traditional, adult learner that we are on the hook to provide for. When the university is asking for that kind of agility and support on innovation, and to respond to crises, they rely on us.”

Marc Austin | Executive Director of Professional Education and Academic Ventures, George Mason University

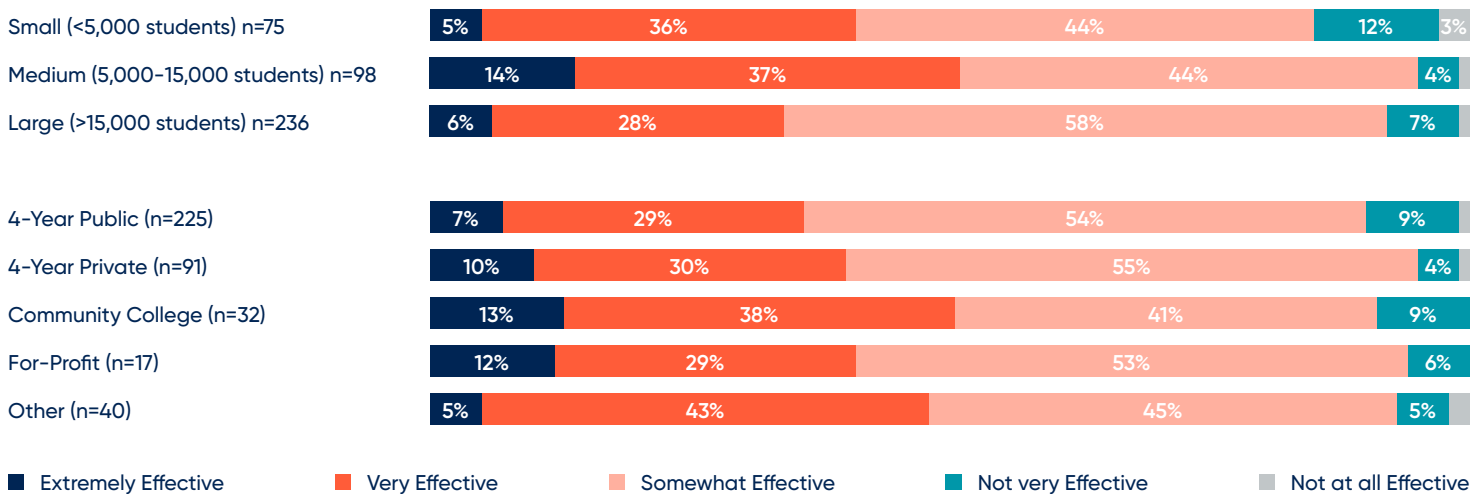


FIGURE 14: EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPETING WITH EMERGING ENTITIES



Medium-sized institutions were most likely to say new, alternative, or microcredentials were extremely (14%) or very effective (37%) in competing with emerging entities. Among various institution types, community colleges had the highest combined percentage of extremely (13%) and very effective (38%).

FIGURE 15: EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPETING BY INSTITUTION SIZE & TYPE



“In the era of Netflix and Amazon Prime, we increasingly want and expect everything to be personalized. ... Students will want courses that are relevant to them, and that don’t repeat what they already know. They’ll want support services specific to their personal circumstance, recommendations for student clubs and activities based on their interest profile, and readily available classes, at times and in formats that work for their schedule.”

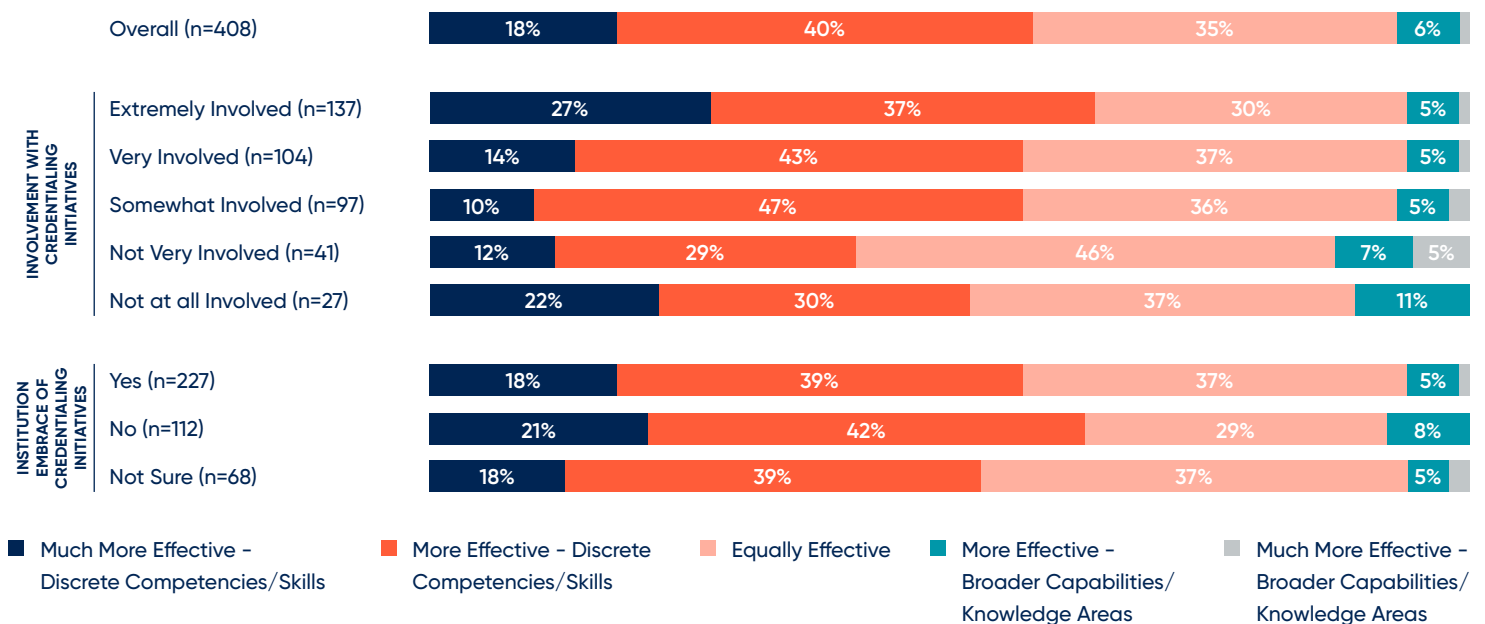
Van Ton-Quinlivan | Executive Vice Chancellor of Workforce and Digital Futures Emeritus, California Community Colleges



Alignment Of Microcredentialing and Outcomes-Based Education

Nearly 60% of respondents felt that emerging credential models are much more (18%) or more (40%) effective as a marker of discrete competencies/skills than broader capabilities/knowledge areas. Those who feel their institution has embraced credentialing initiatives were more likely to say these credentials were more or much more effective as a marker of discrete competencies/skills (57%), compared to those who feel their institution has not (63%).

FIGURE 16: EMERGING CREDENTIAL MODELS - COMPETENCIES/ SKILLS VS. CAPABILITIES/KNOWLEDGE AREAS



“We don’t need to be shackled by the academic calendar, the 13-week semester or other disincentives to individuals looking for just-in-time certifications based on their own schedule.”

Steven Murphy | President and Vice-Chancellor, Ontario Tech University



Figure 17 displays the effectiveness of emerging credential models based on institution size and type. Smaller institutions were more likely to consider emerging credential models to be more or much more effective as a marker of discrete competencies/skills.

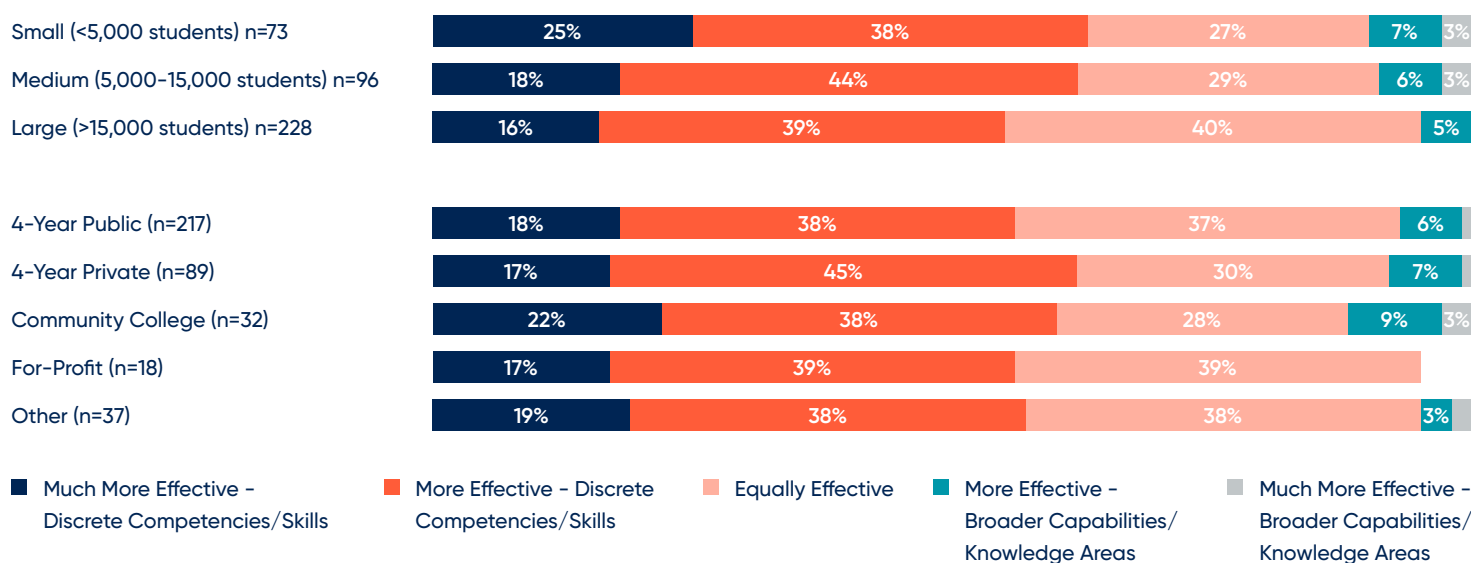


“A typical transcript is actually pretty vague. You have a list of courses and course numbers and grades that somehow add up to a degree, and the assumption is that the person knows something after having gone through this experience. I think that the use of digital badges and microcredentials really paints a deeper and more accurate picture of what an individual has accomplished and learned. Any institution of higher learning that is relevant and paying attention to current trends will at least dip a toe in the water of microcredentials and see how they work for them.”

Cathy Sandeen | President, CSU East Bay



FIGURE 17: EMERGING CREDENTIAL MODELS – COMPETENCIES/SKILLS VS CAPABILITIES/KNOWLEDGE AREAS – BY INSTITUTION SIZE AND TYPE



Microcredentialing and Revenue Growth

While many institutions are seeing the financial potential of new credentials, particularly those that embrace them, there is still a great deal of skepticism or uncertainty regarding this. Almost half of all respondents (48%) neither agree nor disagree that from a fiscal perspective, the development of new credentials has greatly benefited their institution, which suggests a general uncertainty in these credentials' fiscal viability for their institution. Individuals who feel their institution has embraced credentialing initiatives were more likely to agree (41%) or strongly agree (12%), compared to those who feel their institution has not (5% strongly agree, 18% agree).

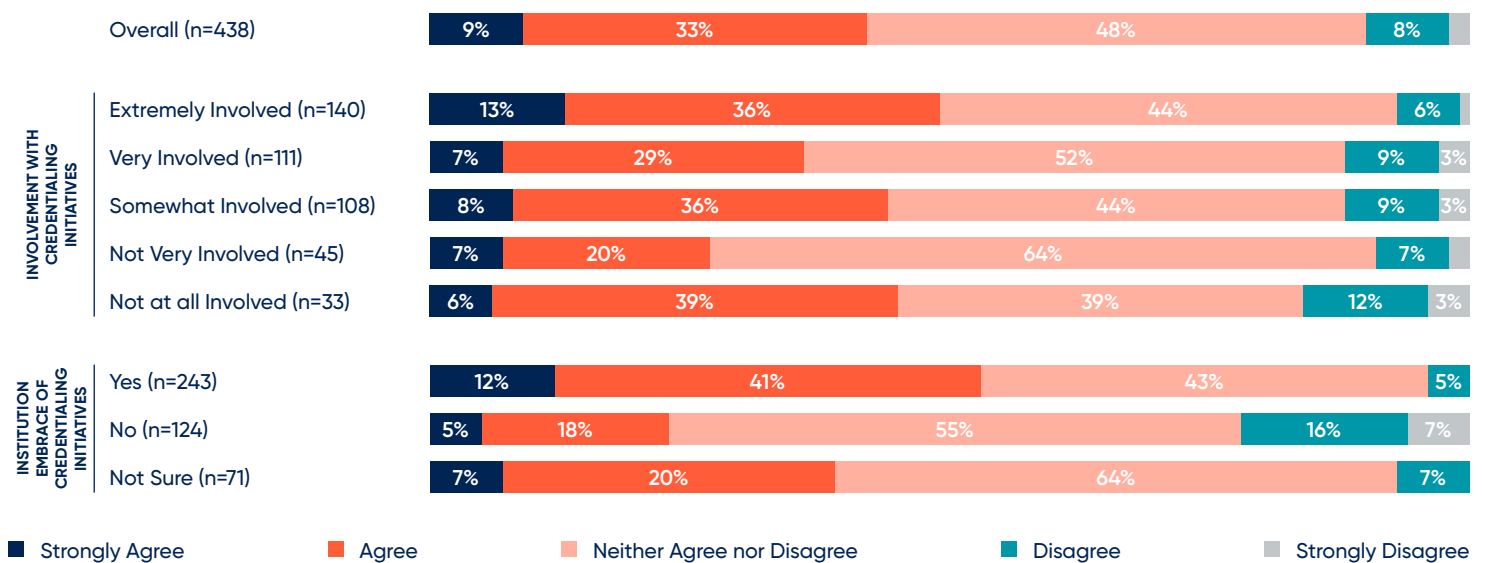


“We’re seeing institutions closing their doors across the postsecondary landscape and those institutions tend to be unable to be innovative in the way they design, deliver and support education. Colleges and universities that stick to the status quo will be putting their sustainability at risk.”

Kim Scalzo | Executive Director of Open SUNY, State University of New York

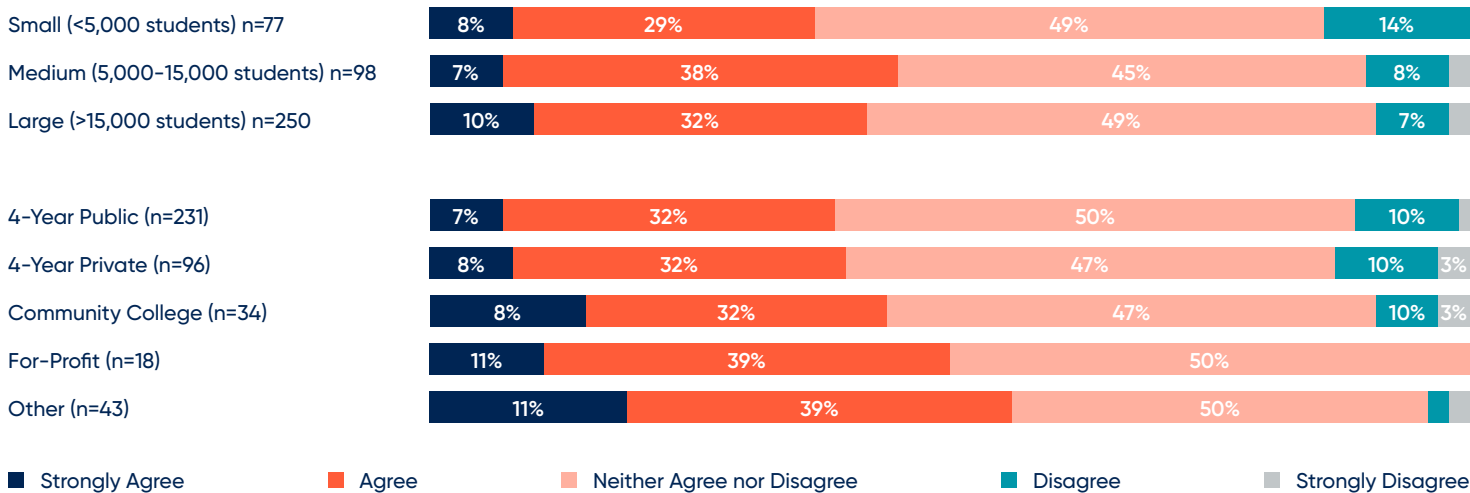


FIGURE 18: FISCAL BENEFITS OF NEW CREDENTIALS



Medium-sized institutions had the highest combined percentage (45%) of respondents who strongly agree or agree that the development of new credentials has greatly benefited their institution from a fiscal perspective. Those from 4-year public institutions had the lowest combined percentage (39%) of those who strongly agreed or agreed.

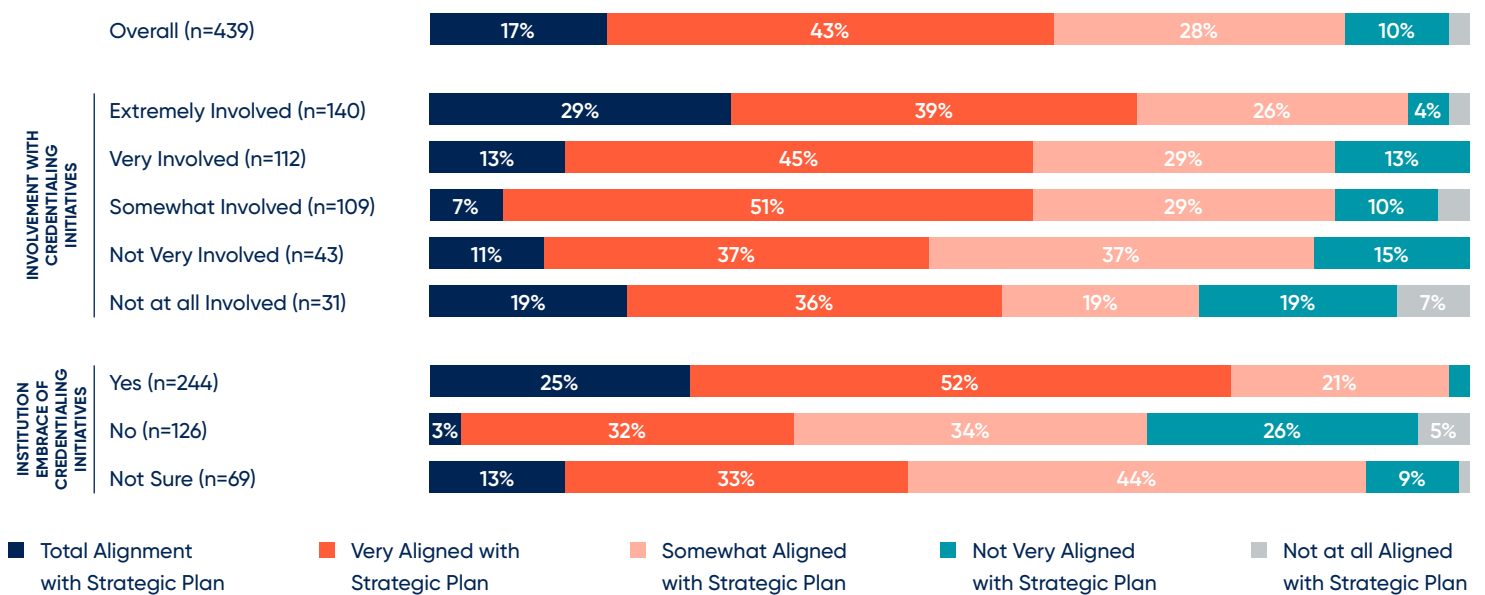
FIGURE 19: FISCAL BENEFITS OF NEW CREDENTIALS BY INSTITUTION SIZE AND TYPE



Alignment Of Microcredentialing And Institutional Strategy

Institutions that see the need for new revenue streams or alignment with a changing economy are more likely to build initiatives such as new credentials as part of their mission/vision or strategic plan. In doing so, this creates an organizational focus on the initiative. Sixty percent of respondents felt that new credential initiatives are totally (17%) or very aligned (43%) with the strategic plan of their institution. Individuals who feel their institution has embraced credentialing initiatives were more likely to say these credentials were totally or very aligned (77%), compared to those that did not feel their institution was embracing these credentials (35%).

FIGURE 20: ALIGNMENT OF NEW CREDENTIAL INITIATIVES



“Given the need for more evidence of applicable knowledge, higher education would be well served to move beyond traditional credentials, lead conversations with industry about helping the workforce become more nimble and take a much more proactive role in expanding alternative forms of educational credentialing.”

David Schjebel | President, Excelsior College



Figure 21 displays the effectiveness of new credential initiative alignment by institution size and type. Approximately 60% of respondents from each institution type said new credential initiatives are totally or very aligned with their strategic plan. For-profit respondents were most likely to say new credential initiatives were totally or very aligned (89%).

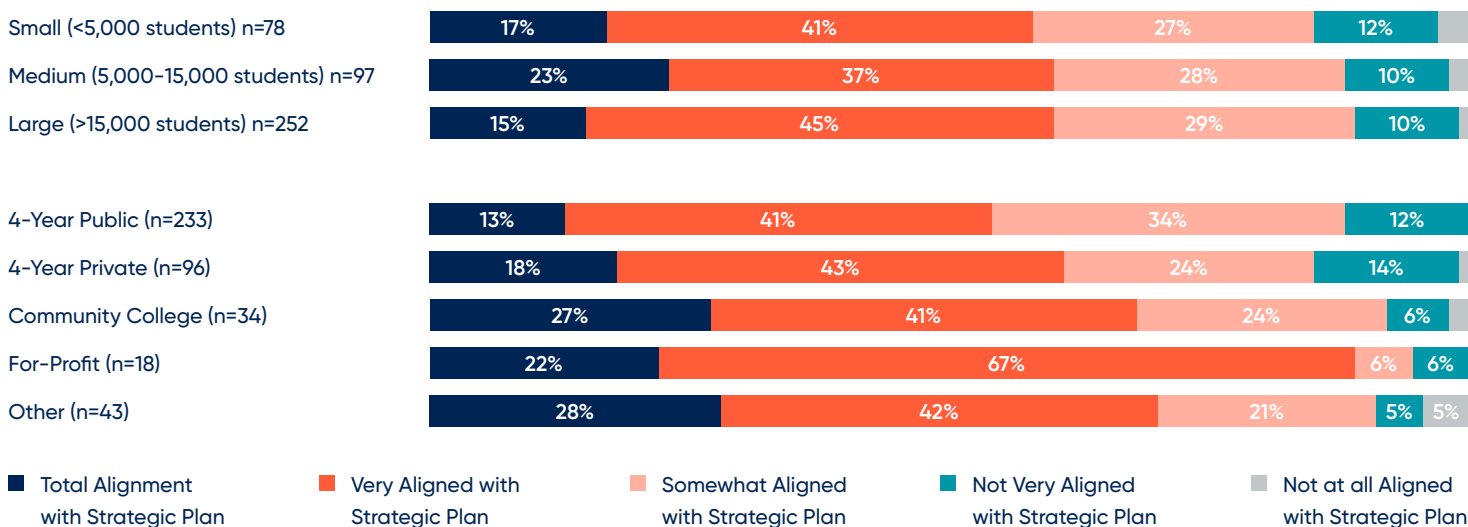


“We need many more on- and off-ramps to learning in postsecondary education. Colleges and universities that are forward thinking acknowledge that four years of school on the front end will not necessarily last a lifetime and that we need to build more accessible and affordable pathways for working adults to continually skill up for opportunities in emergent fields.”

Michelle R. Weise | Vice Chancellor for Strategy and Innovation, National University



FIGURE 21: ALIGNMENT OF NEW CREDENTIAL INITIATIVES – BY INSTITUTION SIZE & TYPE



Economics is driving advancements and progress with new credentials. Seventy-one percent of respondents agree (43%) or strongly agree (28%) that the development of new credentials is critical to their institution’s revenue and enrollment goals. Individuals who feel their institution has embraced credentialing initiatives were more likely to agree or strongly agree (76%), compared to those who feel their institution has not (63%).

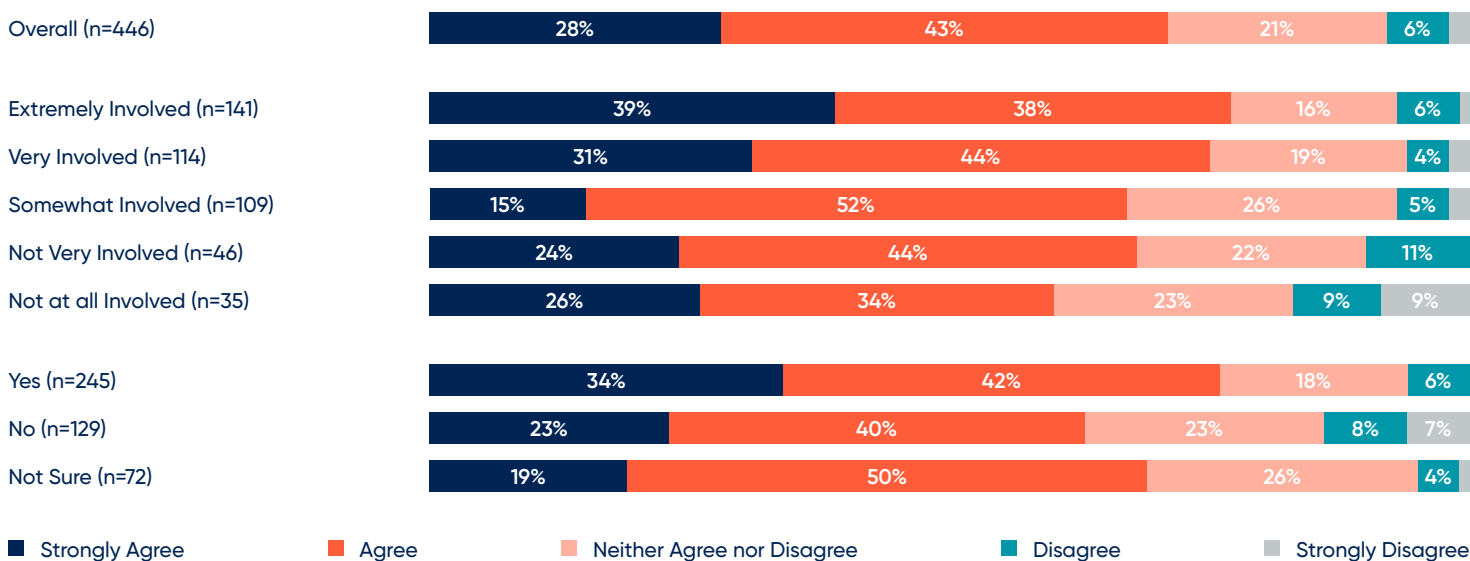


“Digital credentials are just catching on and, in my opinion, they are here to stay. Before you start telling me that employers don’t care about these things, just wait. Exposure right now is low, and some of the younger organizations we work with are already asking for digital credentials. It’s coming.”

Kristine Collins | Assistant Dean of Academic Programs in the School of Continuing Studies, University of Toronto



FIGURE 22: INSTITUTION REVENUE AND ENROLLMENT GOALS



Once again, medium institutions appear to place greater importance on new credential development than small and large ones. Over a third of these respondents (35%) from medium institutions strongly agreed that the development of new credentials is critical to their institution’s revenue and enrollment goals. Forty-one percent of respondents from community colleges also strongly agreed.



“A trend that I see disrupting the market is “shopping” for courses. We tend to think of education in a very traditional way: A student fills out an application, enrolls in an institution, stays there until they graduate, and then moves on. As education becomes an increasingly online experience, it’s going to become more à la carte, where students select courses from multiple institutions to put together a package of credentials that works for them. Those institutions will be selected by price, reputation and convenience. Some of the educational experience will be online, some of it will be blended, and some of it will be face-to-face. Tomorrow’s student won’t be bound by the same kind of traditions and structures that many of us knew as we moved through higher education. That’s going to shift the framework towards these smaller credentialing units, short term training and microcredentials.”

Mark Mrozinski | Assistant Vice President of Workforce Development and Executive Dean of Community Education, Harper College



FIGURE 23: INSTITUTION REVENUE AND ENROLLMENT GOALS - BY INSTITUTION SIZE & TYPE

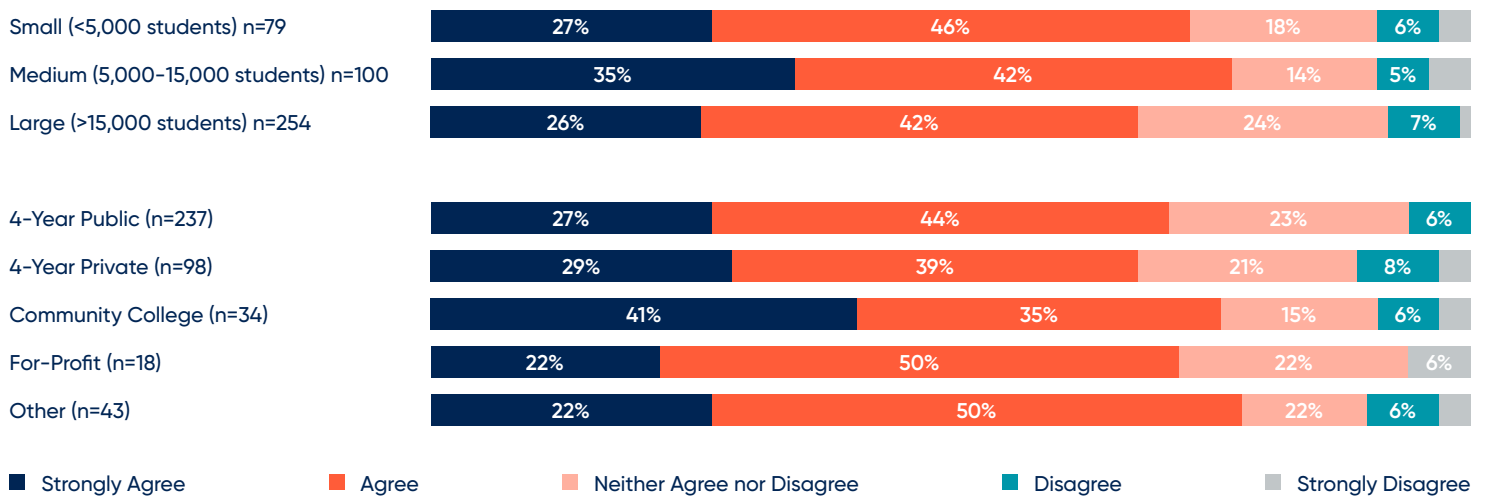


Figure 24 details how strongly individuals agree with the statement that the development of new credentials is critical to their institution’s revenue and enrollment goals by the alignment of new credential initiatives with the strategic plan of their institution. Among respondents who felt new credential initiatives are totally aligned with the strategic plan of their institution, approximately two-thirds (68%) strongly agree that the development of new credentials is critical to their institution’s revenue and enrollment goals. Those who felt new credential initiatives were very or somewhat aligned with the strategic plan of their institution were less likely to feel the development of new credentials was critical to their institution’s revenue and enrollment goals.

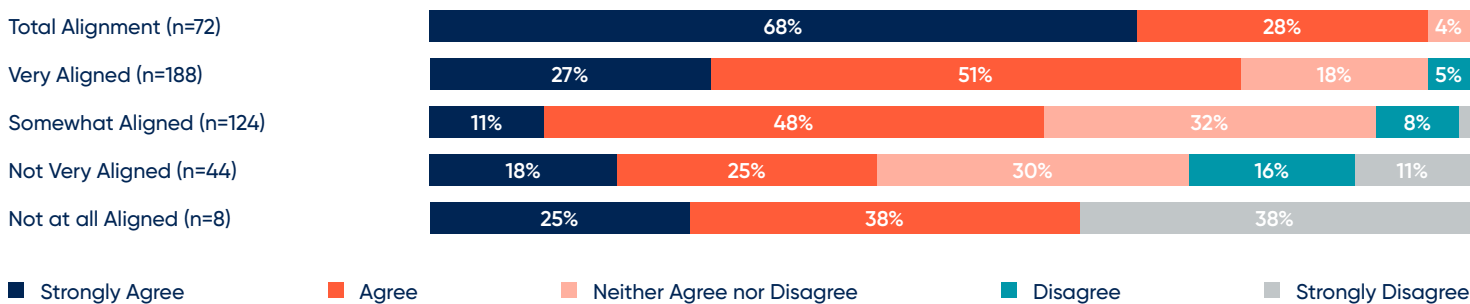


“An institution can enhance its own reputation by being very thoughtful and systematic about which badge issuers they align with. Also, if an institution becomes a badge issuer itself, it’s critical that they pay close attention to guiding criteria and assessments. The worst thing that we can do in the microcredential space is to create easy to earn, cheap badges that people use to pad their resumes. That’s not what this is all about—it has to be about quality.”

Cathy Sandeen | President, CSU East Bay



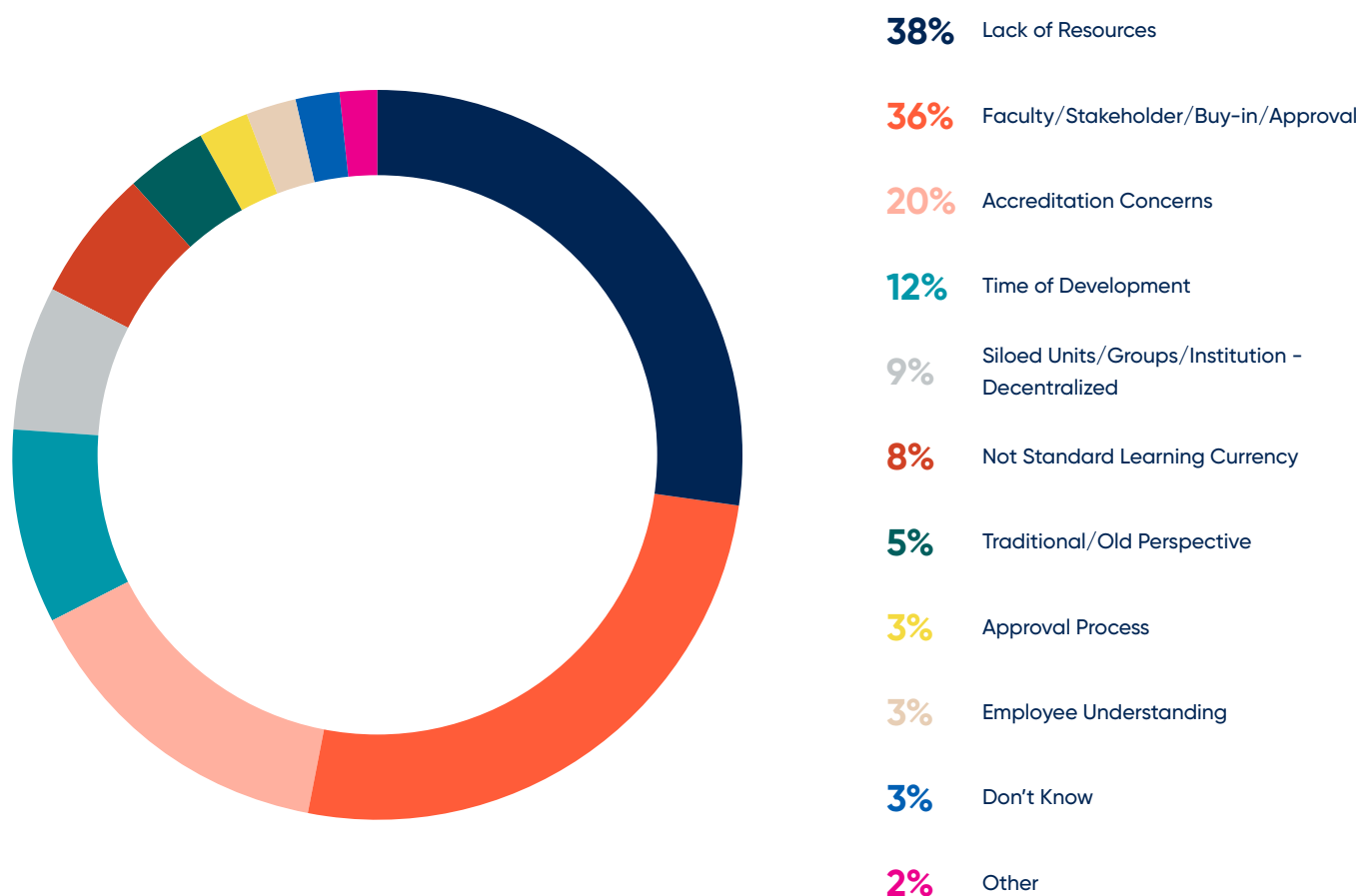
FIGURE 24: INSTITUTION REVENUE AND ENROLLMENT GOALS - BY ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN



Obstacles And Challenges

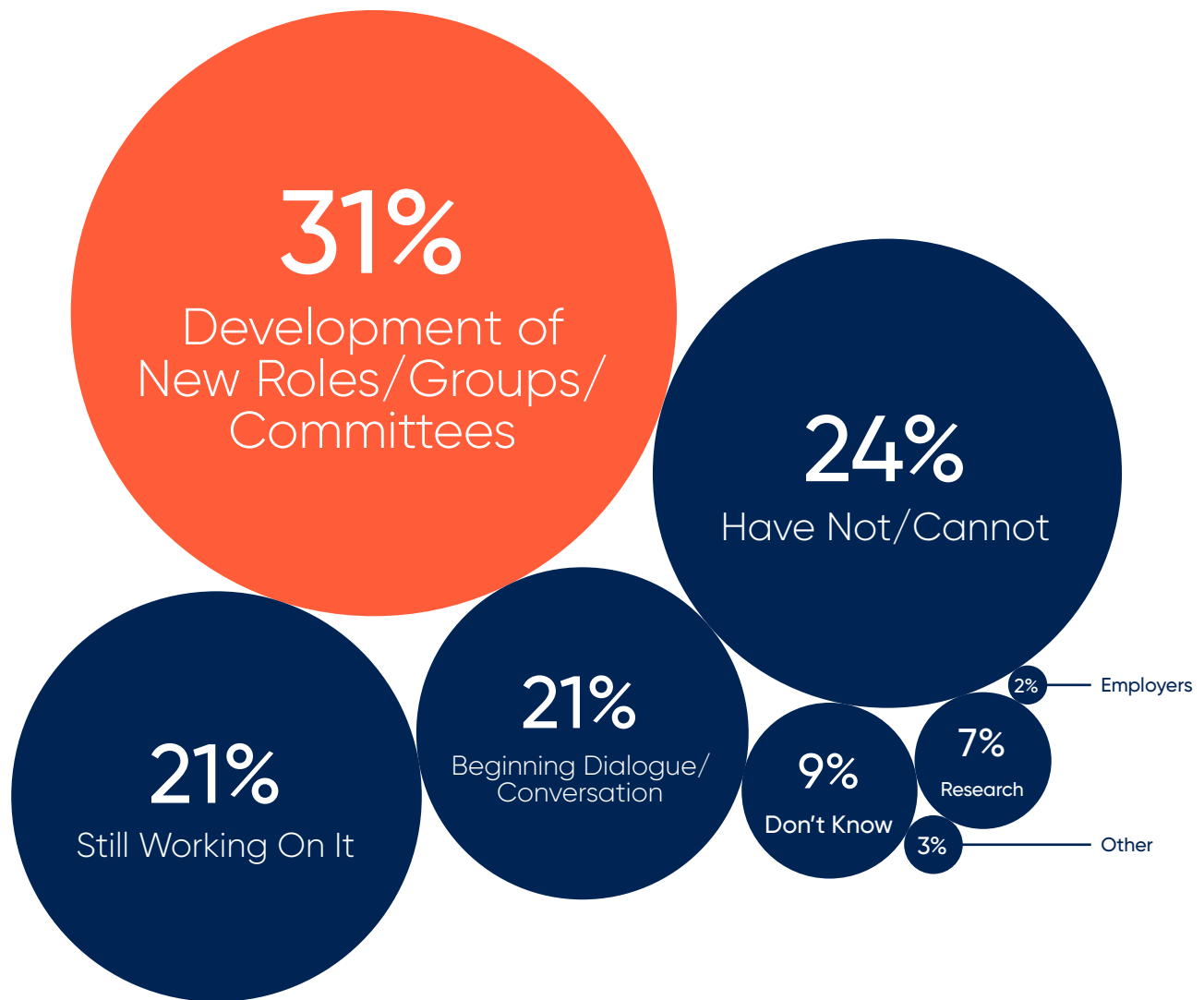
There are a number of internal and external challenges that institutions face in the development of new credentials. Internal challenges such as lack of resources (38%) and faculty/stakeholder buy-in/ approval (36%) were more common than external challenges. External factors, such as accreditation concerns (20%) and microcredentials not being a standard currency of learning (8%) were also seen as significant challenges.

FIGURE 25: CHALLENGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW CREDENTIALS (N=323)



For new credential initiatives to accelerate or develop, a number of hurdles need to be overcome. Figure 26 displays the approaches institutional leaders have taken to address challenges to developing new credentials. Thirty-one percent of respondents said that their institution has addressed the challenges of creating new credentials through the development of new roles/ groups/committees, while 24% said that they have not yet/cannot address these barriers.

FIGURE 26: APPROACHES TO OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO NEW CREDENTIALS (N=276)



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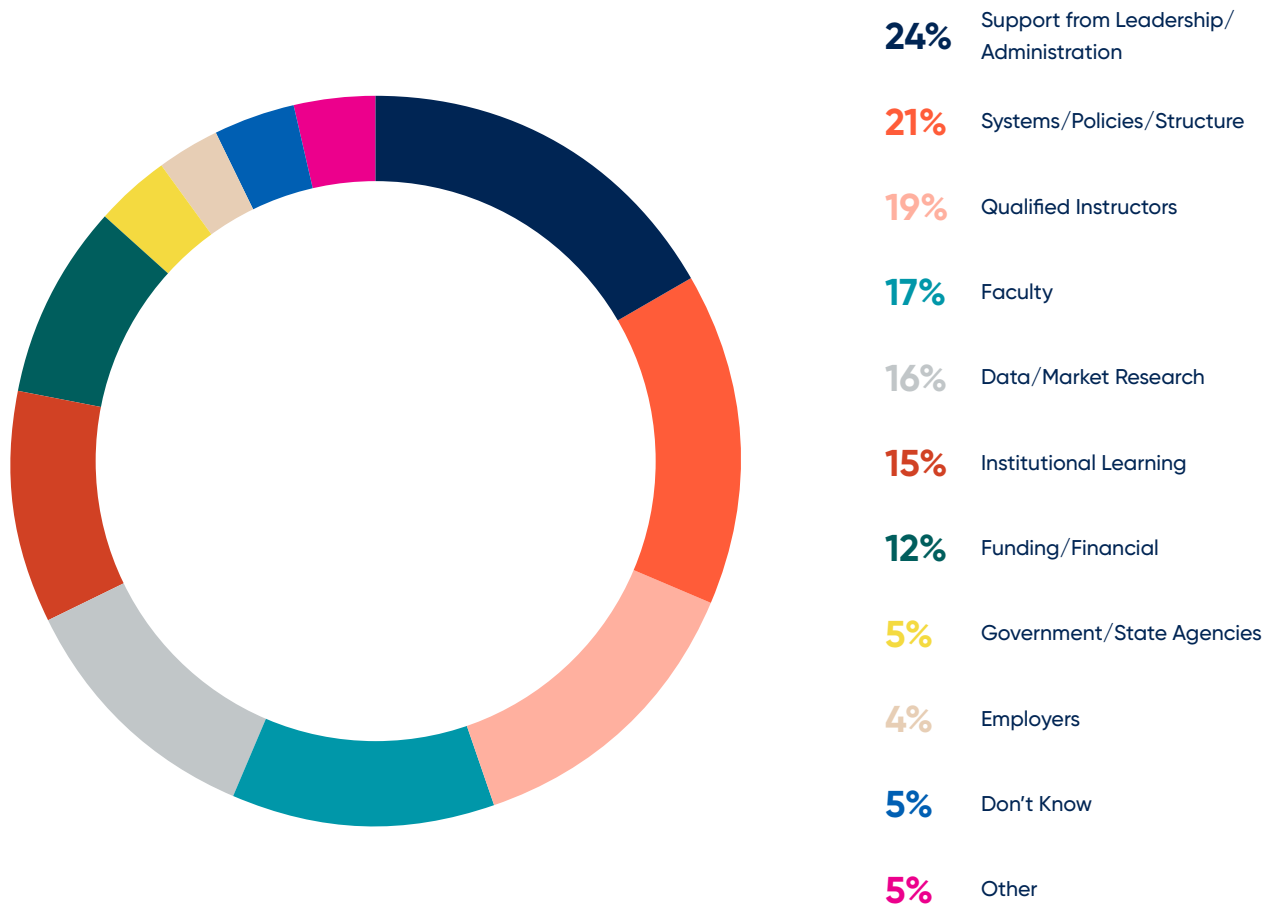
“Working within an academic institution that follows the academic calendar is a challenge. Additionally, working in an institution where scheduling happens centrally and classroom space can be hard to come by is a challenge. ... Broadly speaking, working within a structure that follows a strictly academic model can be very challenging for a division serving ‘non-traditional’ learners.”

Nazlin Hirji | Executive Director of Continuing and Professional Studies, Sheridan College

”

For new credential initiatives to advance, the needs or involvement of many stakeholder groups must be addressed. Figure 27 shows the most important sources of academic support postsecondary leaders need to advance new credential initiatives. Twenty-four percent of respondents believe support from leadership/administration is the most important factor postsecondary leaders need in place to advance to new credentials, while 21% said systems, policies, and structures, and 19% said qualified instructors.

FIGURE 27: SOURCES OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR NEW CREDENTIAL INITIATIVES (N=253)

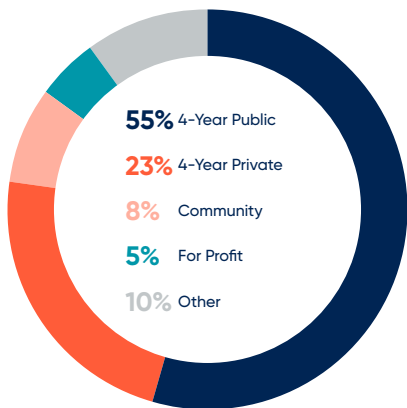


Demographics

Figure 28 displays general institutional demographic data. Over half of respondents (55%) are from a 4-year public institution. "Other" responses included a continuing education program, a graduate school, and a non-profit professional association. The majority of institutions (59%) are large with over 15,000 students. Figure 29 details data regarding the career and position titles of the respondents. Over half of all respondents (55%) are in the senior or upper-level portions of their career. About a quarter (26%) stated that their position title is a director.

FIGURE 28: INSTITUTIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR INSTITUTION? (N=444)



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR INSTITUTION'S SIZE? (N=448)

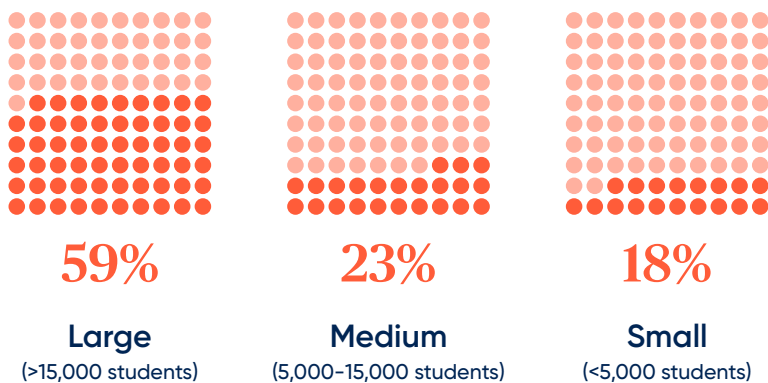
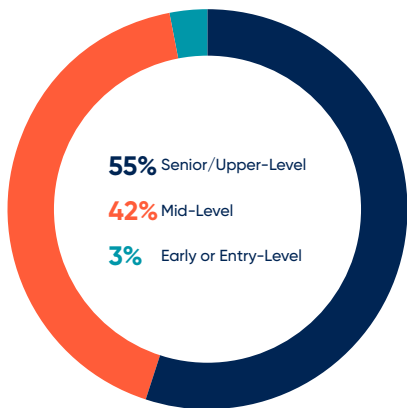


FIGURE 29: CAREER AND POSITION TITLE OF RESPONDENTS

AT WHAT POINT IN YOUR CAREER WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF? (N=448)



WHAT IS YOUR TITLE? (N=383)

26%	Director
9%	Faculty Member
9%	Dean
9%	Associate/Assistant Dean
8%	Program Manager/Director/Coordinator
5%	Executive Director
4%	Vice President
3%	Instructional Designer
2%	Vice Provost
1%	Don't Know
25%	Other

Impact on Higher Education

The currency of learning is changing, as employers are playing a greater role in defining competencies and educational needs, some of which may not fully rely on a college degree. While established credentials such as degrees will continue to be an integral piece of an institution's portfolio and a valued and easily understood denomination, microcredentials are very likely to play an increasingly prominent and important role. As evidenced by this report, institutions are often reactive and develop new programs only when market factors force their hand. While institutions of higher education acknowledge the importance of both local and national labor and occupational data, it is as if they embrace the needs of business and industry if those needs fit within the established confined constraints of traditional higher education. There is a clear lack of urgency to adapt and cultivate microcredentials and new credentials to meet the needs of labor and industry or a resistance to build new currencies of learning that stack toward higher education's pillar of learning ... the degree.

For many institutions, these are uncharted waters that produce a number of concerns and uncertainties. The general lack of standardized, recognized, and accepted frameworks has caused a great deal of confusion. Additionally, some institutions are concerned with regulatory or accreditation limitations, and while some of these concerns may be valid, others are simply perceived. Further complicating matters are

internal inefficiencies and governance around what merits learning and conversion from noncredit learning to credit currencies.

As a result of uncertainty around new credentials for learning, institutions are showing a lack of urgency or slower than expected progress toward their adoption. While more institutions are seeing the adoption and development of new credentials as becoming more important or part of the institution's goals or strategies, the percentage seeing this as critical to the institution's revenue and enrollment goals is lower than expected, especially given dismal recent news regarding enrollment and revenue declines. While 71% of respondents agree (43%) or strongly agree (28%) that the development of new credentials is critical to their institution's revenue and enrollment goals, only 60% felt that new credential initiatives are totally (17%) or very aligned (43%) with the strategic plan of their institution.

Challenges Faced by New Microcredential Development

Microcredentials often face hurdles that are non-existent for traditional programs. While some internal challenges are universal, such as a lack of resources, microcredential development often suffers from a lack of faculty or administrative buy-in or approval. While it is essential for institutions to protect

and ensure the quality of the education they offer, there is a clear disconnect between the reality of microcredentials and their perception within traditional higher education communities. Perception among some faculty and administrators is that microcredentials are less rigorous. This is a narrow focus and does not adequately capture what microcredentials can be and the objectives they can serve. This internal conflict unnecessarily compounds external challenges and is often misguided.

Mitigating Challenges Associated with New Credential Development

While the development of new microcredentials often presents unique challenges, many of the potential solutions are established methods that institutions have utilized in the past. One of the main ways to address the challenges associated with the development of new credentials is the creation of new roles, groups, or committees that assist in the creation and development of microcredential programs. Involving faculty in the development process facilitates the creation of a program that is seen as having acceptable academic rigor, thus reducing internal friction. Academic leadership also needs to communicate the importance of microcredentials and the role they must play in the institution's strategy moving forward.



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