Sabbatical Leave Taken
Fall 2015

Towards Using Digital Badging Technology to Extend the Formal Assessment and Accreditation Framework to Include Informal Competency-Based Knowledge

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Sabbatical Project Title: Towards Using Digital Badging Technology to Extend the Formal Assessment and Accreditation Framework to Include Informal Competency-based Knowledge

Keywords: Competency-based education, 21st century technologies, assessment and accreditation, individualized learning.

Subject and Goals of Sabbatical Leave

Subject

My sabbatical semester and project focused on integrating my professional life and current research interests with scholarship in emergent areas. The overall goal of this work is the development of a system of policies and procedures that credentials formal, “quasi-formal”, and informal competence-based knowledge into the traditional assessment and accreditation process. This process would use emergent technologies to support the assessment of knowledge gained from all situations: formal, non-formal, and informal. Higher Education mostly focuses on formal knowledge gained through postsecondary institutions. My philosophy is the focus should be on capturing and credentialing learning and not the space within which the learning took place. I further believe this system of credentialing can be accomplished with the support and integration of digital badging technology into the teaching and learning environment and also made accessible to college and university data management systems.

Digital badges are an assessment and credentialing mechanism that is housed and managed online. Badges are designed to make visible and validate learning in both formal and informal settings, and hold the potential to help transform where and how learning is valued. MacArthur Foundation (n.d.).

Goals

Two initial sub-goals were identified that will support the attainment of the larger goal.

1. Develop in-depth expertise in design and implementation of competency-based assessment systems that are supported by digital badging technologies.
2. Develop a preliminary framework to integrate digital badging within a traditional assessment and accreditation framework.

Sabbatical Semester Activities

Activities took me on a professional development journey to six countries that enabled me to meet with and learn from experts engaged in various aspects of this work. Four countries are in the European Union (Scotland, The Netherlands, Belgium, and France) and are at the forefront of work in prior learning assessment. I also had meetings Canada and the United States of America.
Macro Level Quality Assurance: Competency-Based Performance by Degree Level

My first meeting was with Melissa Gleckler, University of Toledo’s (UT’s) resident prior learning assessment (PLA) expert (September, 2015). I wanted to get a sense of how UT managed this process and how integrated the assessment process was within degrees. UT served as an initial American higher education benchmark. My meeting with Ms. Gleckler provided me with an early grounding and also led to national resources through the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) organization. This information also provided a basis for US-based policy and practices comparisons with those of the European Union where this movement began and is being implemented systematically and systemically across 47 countries.

The European Union (EU) has embarked on a large scale degree qualifications and tuning project that extends the concept of open boarders to post-secondary education and professional qualifications through their Higher Education Area. Forty-seven European countries signed the Bologna Deceleration (2004) and have agreed to implement a system of student-centered, outcome-based, and transparent higher education across degree levels. They have created a system of degree qualification frameworks and credits to which learning expectations in any degree and at any degree level can be mapped within and across countries and disciplines. These systems are built on a competency-based framework to which knowledge and performance levels are identified at various degree levels. A core consideration of Bologna is the integration of lifelong learning – informal learning experiences – through the recognition of prior learning (RPL) (also known as prior learning assessment) where university-level knowledge and skills are captured and transcripted for college credit. Knowledge is the focus and thus uncouples learning (the knowledge itself) from learning setting.

It is this system of competency-based learning that, if adopted, can potentially disrupt and extend our current approach to quality assurance in learning and learning environments. This includes data management related to and reporting on student learning outcomes. Thus, this portion of my inquiry and project brought me to the EU to meet with and learn from faculty, staff, and administrators, all of whom are engaged in some aspect of the RPL work. See Appendix A and B for site visit details.

I also had the opportunity to attend two international quality assurance conferences that focused on prior learning recognition and international student education. The first was the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA) conference in Toronto, Canada (October, 2015). A key consideration of Canada’s PLA movement is improving the integration of immigrants who arrive with professional qualifications and experiences from their home countries. The focus of the fall 2015 conference was the implementation of an RPL Quality Assurance Manual that will be a resource for the national RPL movement in Canada. This resource will help “practitioners and those new to the field, to explore more effective and reliable ways to assess and recognize the skills and competences of newcomers and experienced Canadians using quality practices” (CAPLA, 2015). The second conference was the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA) in Paris (November, 2015). This conference focused on quality assurance and international and global education, with participants from all over the world including Europe, Asia, Africa, and the North America.
Micro Level Quality Assurance: Capturing Competences with Authentic Assessment supported with Digital Badges

One of the constant and ongoing challenges for assessment and accreditation is the development of valid and reliable assessment systems and practices that accurately, reliably, and fairly captures learning. Supporting RPL extends this challenge of recognizing and valuing learning regardless of associated setting. Higher Education mostly relies on a system of transcripts that describe learning in terms of limited-length course descriptions and credit hours. A digital badge is a new technology that is being adopted to support the assessment of learning in a variety of settings. The digital badge itself is a web-enabled token that integrates all components of the assessment including the artifact, evaluator, criteria, and assessment decision (e.g. grades) related to the earning of the badge. In spite of being relatively new and emergent, interest and adoption is spreading nationally and globally, and supporting learning systems associated with universities and non-university entities including governments.

I have had the opportunity to meet with experts – faculty and staff – at Penn State University who are engaged in digital badge related scholarship and university-wide initiatives (Professor Kyle Peck, Dr. Catherine Augustine, Kyle Bowen, Chris Gamrat, and others). As part of my sabbatical, I took the opportunity to meet with faculty members at Purdue University (October, 2015) who have successfully integrated badges within their courses and have published their best practices (Dr. Pamela Karagory and Kristen Kirby).

Post-Sabbatical Work: Teaching, Research, and Service

The sabbatical time also enabled me to formalize work already started while integrating new ones within my own research agenda and professional practice. All focus on key components of higher education quality assurance (macro and micro) and include:

- integrating competency-based approaches into my Research and Measurement (RESM) courses
- examining and documenting the adoption and diffusion of digital badge technology in higher education assessment and quality assurance applications nationally and internationally
- beginning an international survey-based study of faculty knowledge about, attitude towards and receptivity towards RPL (IRB approval pending), and
- developing a theoretical framework that integrates digital badges and competency-based approaches in the assessment and accreditation process.

In addition to establishing contacts with national and international experts, since returning from sabbatical, among other things, I:

- have submitted three conference proposals to international conferences, two of which have been accepted, one of have been presented, one is under review
- chaired a session on international experiences and student mobility at an international conference
- am co-authoring a journal article on digital badge adoption and diffusion in higher education with a graduate student;
- have submitted an interdisciplinary research grant that seeks to design a 3+1 bachelor’s to masters degree and
• am implementing the first offering of an international assessment and leadership practicum for undergraduate and graduate students to China in June, 2016. I drafted the design for this experience a year ago after participating in Educator to Educator programs in 2014 and 2015.

Closing Comments

The sabbatical came at the perfect time in my career. It allowed me to explore ideas, learn from experts, and pursue themes of inquiry that I think are of value to higher education quality assurance and student learning. I am thankful that the University afforded me this opportunity.
Appendix A: Site Visit Schedule for Scotland

**Tuesday September 15, 2015**

Arrive Glasgow

**Wednesday September 16, 2015**

**Glasgow Caledonian University**

Team Members (**Ruth Whitaker, Karla Benske, Julie Brown, and Marty Wright**)  

Team has done a substantial amount of writing and presentation on the topic. As a group, the team has completed a number of small-scale research projects. One team member – Ruth Whitaker – is an internationally known expert in RPL. She is a member of the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) writing group.

**Friday September 18, 2015**

**Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership Office**

RPL Workshop with **Anthony O'Reilly**

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is a new way of understanding qualifications in Scotland. Its main purpose is to make the relationships between qualifications clearer. This, in turn, will make progression and transfer between qualifications easier. These were the workshop topics.
Appendix B: Site Visit Schedule for The Netherlands and Belgium

Gegevens

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Pagina van de universiteit http://www.utoledo.edu/education/depts/efl/faculty/haughton/

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Sunday September 20, 2015

Arrive Amsterdam

Monday September 21, 2015

In Amsterdam
Morning 9:00 am: Ruud Duvekot
Prins Bernhardplein 175
1097 BL Amsterdam
Telephone Ruud Duvekot: 0031 6 23694380

Afternoon 1:30 pm: Lucie Lintelo: Hogeschool van Amsterdam, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences
Address: Gebouw (Venue) Leeuwenborgh
Telephone: 0031 06-21155303.

Tuesday September 22, 2015

In The Hague
4:00 pm: Patrick Leushuis: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Wednesday September 23, 2015

In Den Bosch
10:00 am: Tijs Pijls, RPL Knowledge Centre
Adress: Stationsplein 14, Hertogenbosch
Telephone: 0031 73 610 5330

Thursday September 24, 2015

In Leuven
2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
An Peeters, RPL expert
Telephone: 0032 16 32 09 06
Hogeschool Leuven
Associatie KU Leuven, Schapenstraat 34 te Leuven
And the meeting is in the ‘Dijlezaal’.

Friday September 25, 2015

In Brussels
10.00 am: AKOV - in the Ministry of Education, for Flanders

Robin Vanderelst, Project manager
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Haughton Spring 2016
And:

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