

## Credly's CEO on how colleges can prepare students for skills-based hiring

Jonathan Finkelstein joins our series in which higher ed leaders answer questions about changes in postsecondary education.

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*In this series, we ask education leaders how they perceive current opportunities and threats in postsecondary education. Read the previous post here.*

Since it launched in 2013, Credly has tried to help recognize the shorter bursts of learning that happen within and outside of traditional degree pathways.

Its short-form credentials, sometimes called "badges," have been used by colleges and employers to reward students or workers for mastering hard and "soft" skills.

But this is an area higher education is still sorting out. Among its questions are how to compare similar short-form programs across institutions, and whether employers will universally accept them. And while colleges are beginning to offer them, they are doing so gradually.

Jonathan Finkelstein, Credly's founder and CEO, is optimistic that the market will become more open to these credentials. For its part, the company is working with other credentials providers to develop a common language for describing these programs that, they hope, will aid their uptake by making their value easier to determine.

Below, Education Dive asked Finkelstein three questions over email about the future of postsecondary education.



*Jonathan Finkelstein is the founder and CEO of Credly. | Credit: Credly*

**EDUCATION DIVE: What's the biggest change you see underway in postsecondary education from how the sector has previously operated?**

**FINKELSTEIN:** The most exciting change is a shift away from the all-or-nothing paradigm of credentialing in higher ed.

Traditionally, whether students complete 25%, 50% or 90% of their programs, they receive the same level of recognition from their institution — none at all. This has created a population of "some college, no degree" students who have invested significant time, effort and resources into their postsecondary education, and who have gained skills and competencies but have no way of demonstrating what they've learned or of unlocking the labor market value of these abilities.

Institutions are increasingly offering more granular badges and credentials that help translate academic content into workplace skills — and that help avoid the trap of having student loan debt but nothing to show for it. Additionally, colleges are also using badges and credentials to shine the light on workplace skills gained in college that don't always appear on a resume. For example,

Credly and Education Design Lab have partnered with several universities to recognize students' demonstrated soft skills.

**What are the most common questions Credly gets from employers and colleges about how students are being prepared for the workforce or further study through your programs?**

**FINKELSTEIN:** Generally, colleges and universities want to know what skills employers are looking for, and employers want to understand what students know and can do. The challenge comes in translating academic coursework into the skills and competencies that employers understand and are looking for.

To share an example, the Colorado Community College System engaged employers and employment experts to identify and define the skills and competencies required for success within the region's advanced manufacturing industry, make small changes to existing coursework to provide students with opportunities to develop those skills. And it worked with Credly to provide students with credentials recognizing their skills that they can share with employers.

**What does the postsecondary education sector need to do to be ready for the potential forecasted recession?**

**FINKELSTEIN:** We don't know what the economic future will bring, but we do know that proven skills are the currency of the modern labor market. Employers are adopting skills-based hiring and promotion practices, making the translation between academic credentials and workplace competencies even more important.

To adapt to these larger trends, postsecondary education institutions need to provide learners with opportunities to gain the workforce skills they want and then communicate those to employers. Digital credentials could be a valuable tool in this regard by providing a verified record of an individual's knowledge

and skills that can be shared with employers to differentiate themselves during the hiring process.

And because enrollment in higher ed institutions has historically increased in an economic downturn, colleges may realize that offering academic credit for skills learned in the workforce offers a way to recruit students eager to find the fastest, cheapest path to a new credential.

IBM and Northeastern University offer one such example: Badges issued through Credly and earned through certain IBM training programs can be used to earn credit in some Northeastern master's degree programs, shortening the time to completion for students.