

# Using Digital Badges to Assess College Readiness

Barry Fishman

School of Information & School of Education  
University of Michigan

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# Acknowledgements

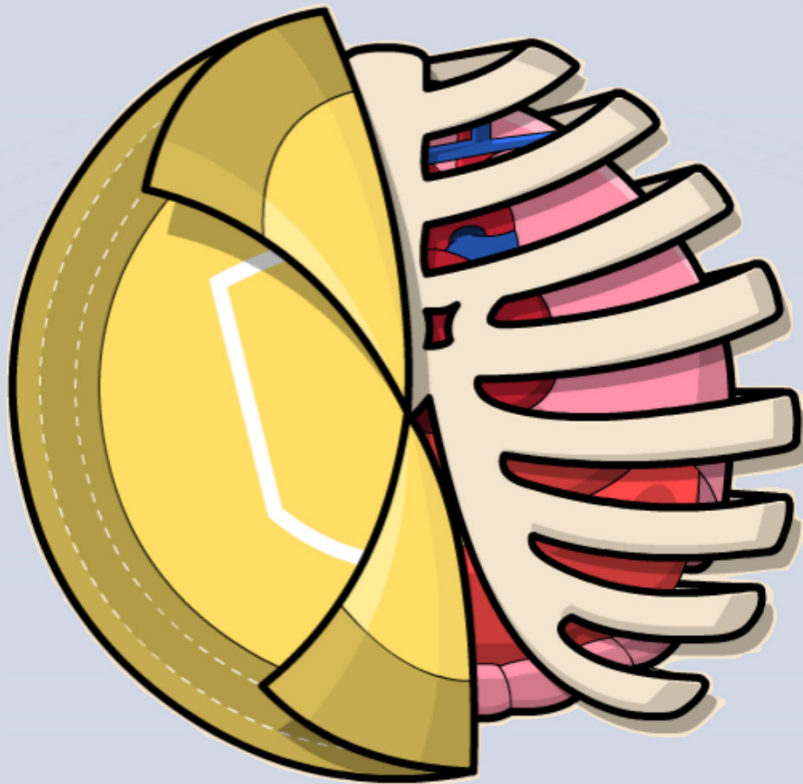
- Stephanie Teasley, School of Information
- Steven Cederquist, School of Education
- Marc Lesser, Mouse
- Nichole Pinkard, Chicago City of Learning
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# What *is* a digital badge?

- A record of learning or accomplishment
- Provides greater context than grades, GPAs, or standardized test scores
- Can be organized to represent paths, complex accomplishments
- Can be re-presented by learners for various purposes (like portfolios)
- Meta-data is key to their power

# Anatomy of a digital badge



**Badge name**

**Description**

**Criteria**

**Issuer**

**Evidence**

**Date issued**

**Expiration**

**Standards**

**Tags**

**Vocabulary note: Digital badges = micro-credentials. (Your mileage may vary!)**



# Why badges for college?

- Expanding *access to* higher education
  - Recruit learners who have great potential, but have not been successful by traditional measures
- Expanding *success in* higher education
  - Use badges to reshape the way we guide and mark student progress in higher ed, creating a more complete and transparent record for future use
  - Badges can be a key component of mastery-based assessment and student-tracking systems

# We held a workshop...

Our challenge to workshop participants:

- To envision “new cultural practices” or infrastructures in support of college admissions — powered by digital micro-credentials — that can increase access to and success in college for diverse learners
- To identify challenges and opportunities for further research and design(s) to realize the vision(s)



# Driving questions

- Can micro-credentials serve as valid and reliable measures of prior learning and future potential?
- What “gap” in current admissions practices can be filled by micro-credentials?
- What is required for micro-credentials to be useful for college admission?

# It takes a village...

**Admissions  
Officers  
(Consumers)**

**Badge Awarding  
Organizations  
(Producers)**

**Assessment  
Experts  
(Endorsers)**

**University  
Administrators  
(Endorsers)**

**University  
Faculty  
(Consumers)**

**Technology  
Providers  
(Supporters)**





# How do colleges “do” admissions?

- Holistic review with multiple rounds
- Focus on “potential for success”
- Goal is to develop diversity within pool of applications & admits
- Determine “authenticity” of student interest and experience
- Scale is an ongoing challenge
- Colleges are in competition with each other in unexpected ways

# Admissions challenges

- Undermatch
- Lack of student awareness of financial aid options
- Overburdened or poorly informed high school advising
- Legal challenges to diversity initiatives; must avoid bias
- Problems with standardized tests; mostly they measure SES
- Challenges with interpreting GPA across schools
- Much more validated information about “formal” than “informal” student learning
- How to preserve student agency in the process?  
How to avoid “arms races”?



# Examples at the workshop

- **Mouse:** National youth development nonprofit focused on coding and computational thinking
  - Empower all students to create with technology to solve real problems and make meaningful change in our world
  - Partnership with Parsons New School for Design to validate badge pathways for use in college admission and credit/placement
- **Chicago City of Learning:** A learning ecosystem/network
  - Supports young people to explore and uncover resources across an entire city and find out what they can learn, make, do, and ultimately become; creates potential for data-driven guidance
  - Focus on social justice, access to resources, and positive growth

# Major issues identified for badges in admissions

- Equity - design to expand access to educational opportunities
- Validity - lies with credibility of badge source & endorsement
- Agency - promote learning, not earning
- Lifelong learning - persistent, interoperable, secure, portable
- Infrastructure - technical & policy issues
- Scalability - context vs. uniformity



## Equity

- Will badges provide opportunities to showcase non-traditional learning?
- Will use of badges stigmatize applicants?
- Will badges provide new opportunity, or just a new “arms race”?

## Validity and Endorsement

- How will admissions officers interpret the meaning of badges?
- How should badges from different issuers be compared/contrasted?
- “Systems” exist for GPA and SAT/ACT... what about badges?



## Agency and Authenticity

- Sustained focus indicates authentic engagement
- How can digital badges promote student agency and authentic paths?
- How can digital badges help students communicate this to admissions?

## Promoting Lifelong Learning

- Will badges allow for continuity from H.S. to college and beyond?
- If learners thrived in non-traditional environments in high school, can we evolve the college learning environment to better support them?



## Need for Infrastructure

- IMS Global is leading a standards-setting process
- Two leading platforms recently merged... is consolidation a risk?
- How to preserve data privacy, ownership, and access?

## Scalability

- What are the implications if badge use in admissions remains “niche”?
- How can we move to scale without recreating challenges around equity, validity, and authenticity that exist in the current system?

***Change and progress in college admissions  
(and college itself) is possible...  
but only through coordinated  
innovation and effort.***

**Our students depend on it.**



# Read the entire report!

<https://tinyurl.com/badges-admissions>

**Thank you.**