

DIGITAL BADGING

A Quick-Start Guide for Higher Education Program Administrators

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WHAT'S A DIGITAL BADGE?



Don't assume that everybody knows (including your boss).

Digital badges document learning accomplishment details through metadata. Yes, badges look cool, but the magic lives in the information stored behind the visual design. Digital badges offer verified data including where and when learning was completed, who issued the badge, and what was required to earn it.

Learners receive this shareable metadata in the form of a "portable" digital badge so they can easily share their accomplishments on LinkedIn and other social media platforms, making them visible to prospective employers, customers, and other groups important to the learner's success.



Save yourself and your learners a lot of trouble by using a platform designed for badging! And if you're planning to issue more than a handful of these, make sure your badging platform integrates with your Learning Management System and/or registration platform so the award process can be automated.

WAIT, ARE YOU SURE THIS IS A GOOD IDEA?



Don't skip this question!

Before you start designing your badge, take some time to think through whether it's actually a good idea, why it matters to you and your learners, and how it fits with your institution's overall goals.

Consider how digital badges will be used by the people receiving them.

- Do digital badges have a direct, tangible benefit to recipients?
- What purpose will badges fill for them?
- How do you imagine people sharing these badges? Where? And why?
- Will employers value this credential? Does it align with real-world workforce needs?
- What purpose will badges fill for them?
- If possible, survey current or former students/participants to find out what they think about digital badges.

Define the strategic purpose of digital badges for your program.

- What is your motivation for offering digital badges?
- What are the costs and how do those costs compare to the benefits?
- Does offering a badge give you a competitive advantage? How?
- How will you communicate the availability of digital badges to prospective registrants?

Take time to explore institutional guidelines or restrictions.

- How will digital badges work in your institution's larger credential ecosystem?
- Is an academic credential already being offered for this learning experience? If so, is there a valid reason to offer additional credentials for that experience?
- Does your institution have policies or guidelines for alternative credentials?
- Is there an approval process that must be followed prior to offering badges with your institution's branding?
- What purpose will badges fill for them?
- Who else on your campus is doing this and what can you learn from them?

DESIGN MATTERS

Every badge is unique, and every aspect of your badge needs to be considered to position your students and your program for maximum success. Be ready to address these questions before you start entering information into your badging platform.

Names matter.

- Does the name make sense to the outside world?
- Is the name an accurate reflection of the learning experience?
- Could it be confused with other similar (or not-so-similar) credentials?
- Does the name leave room for expanding your program with stackable credentials?

Tighten up your description and learning outcomes.

- What valuable knowledge and skills have badge earners attained?
- Are learning outcomes clearly defined, and written with the badge audience in mind?
- What is unique about this learning experience?
- Are there key words or terms to include that will be meaningful to employers?

Check your website (badge metadata includes a URL).

- Do you have a web presence for this learning experience?
- Does the program description on the website match the badge metadata?
- Are you ready for increased visibility? Do you need a design refresh?
- Are you using this opportunity to cross-promote other offerings on your website?

Skills Tags are Your Friends.

PRO TIP Use labor market data to strategically match your program's skills with the skills employers are seeking.

- Can you tag skills with high employer search frequency?
- Are learners gaining skills that make them highly employable?
- How do the skills tags you are choosing differentiate you from similar programs?

Beauty and the Badge

- Does the visual design of the badge fit the tone and skills it represents?
- Is it visually striking? Will it stand out in a competitive marketplace?
- Is it legible in smaller formats?
- Will it be part of a collection of other badges in your program area or institution? Is there an established format you should follow?
- Are you considering accessibility standards in terms of contrast, colors, and fonts?
- Does your institution have branding guidelines you need to follow?

HERE WE GO!

Let's get ready to issue some badges. This part can get complicated, so be sure to think through the entire process before you roll out your beautiful new badges.

- How many badges do you think you'll be issuing now and in the future? Is this scalable with growth?
- How much can you automate? (especially important for larger programs)
- How does your registration system integrate with your badging system?
- What qualifies someone for a badge award (assessment grades, completion, demonstration of mastery, etc.)?
- Are you communicating badge requirements to learners up front (rubric, minimum score, participation expectations, etc.)?
- Will this require extra effort from your instructors?
- Who will answer student questions about badges?
- How will you handle situations where badge requirements are not met?

ARE WE THERE YET?



Don't forget to allocate time and resources to data analysis and maintenance.

The work doesn't end when the badges are issued. In fact, it has just begun. Here are a few things to consider over the longer-term.

- Analytics.** Keep an eye on how many people are accepting the badges and where they are sharing them. This will give you important insights into your badging program, your learners, and your program's value in the marketplace.
- Metadata Updates.** As your curriculum evolves, don't forget to reflect changes in your badge metadata.
- Skills Tags.** Labor market trends are constantly shifting, so be sure to watch for in-demand skills that align with your program content.

UNC-Chapel Hill Digital and Lifelong Learning serves as a central campus resource for badge strategy, design, and delivery. UNC-Chapel Hill units that are interested in issuing digital badges should email [Tyler Ritter](mailto:tyler.ritter@unc.edu), Director of Digital Learning Design & Development.

HAPPY BADGING!