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Alternative Credentials Focused Work Group Final Report

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I. <u>Introduction and National Landscape</u>

Alternative credentialing is already, for many institutions, a key strategy for increasing enrollment and revenue, broadening the institution's reach and influence, and remaining nimble and relevant in a rapidly changing landscape. For students and potential students, alternative credentials offer flexibility and help them meet their specific targeted educational goals for lifetime learning. Alternative credentials offer both institutions and students exciting new pathways forward.

> The landscape of post-secondary education is changing with the emergence of new credentials that are engaging millions of learners. So-called "alternative credentials" – such as micro-credentials, digital badges and industry-recognised certificates – have expanded their scale considerably, as a consequence of a rising demand for upskilling and reskilling, as well as a sharp reduction in the unit cost of provision made possible by digitalisation. Higher education institutions, businesses and other institutions are actively offering alternative credentials that help learners acquire new skills, update their existing skills and signal the competencies they already have. [1]

In this report, the Alternative Credentials Focus Working Group will present major trends and considerations that mark the national and regional landscape, define terms that will help UNI focus our strategies on the best outcomes for the institution and our students, and offer proposals for management structures that would consolidate existing alternative credentials and provide the scaffolding for UNI's further expansion into this exciting area.

We already offer pockets of alternative credentialing in many departments and programs across the university, which we will detail in Appendix III of this report. This allows us to begin by consolidating information about and access to what we already offer at UNI. But it is important to realize that this is an increasingly crowded field, where UNI would be competing with a wide range of providers, and not just other traditional higher education institutions. Competition with nationally-available programs with good name recognition is a danger for institutions like UNI that are new to alternative credentialing at the level proposed in this report; but since these programs also increasingly compete with our more traditional degree offerings, it seems the challenge cannot be ignored.[2] Unique offerings and coordinated programs (like stackable credentials or lifelong learning frameworks) can help make smaller regional institutions like ours competitive.

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[1] Kato et al, "The Emergence of Alternative Credentials" (2020).

[2] "The danger for regionally branded tuition-dependent colleges and universities is that certificates and scaled-degrees from nationally/globally branded institutions will cannibalize demand for master's programs. If this happens, it could throw the delicate economics of the postsecondary system completely out-of-whack." Kim, "Alternative Credentials, Scaled Degrees, and the New Higher Ed Matthew Effect" (2020).

While many audiences will find alternative credentials attractive, one of the biggest will be degreed professionals wanting to retool or upgrade their skills. Therefore alternative credential programs seem most sustainable when initially tied to labor market needs. One factor to keep in mind is that "a population that is now buying songs rather than albums […] may increasingly look for a more modular set of products."[3] Understanding and meeting local needs in a flexible, modular fashion will make UNI competitive in alternative credentialing.

> Alternative credential programmes frequently focus on a range of skills or knowledge that are highly relevant to the labour market. Some aim to develop general skills that are widely applicable, (e.g. language skills); others skills of intermediate generality (e.g. knowledge of software, or project management skills) and still others highly specific knowledge or competencies (e.g. a different set of skills required for school teachers). While some alternative credentials focus on cognitive skills, others help learners develop non-cognitive skills (e.g. resilience). Alternative credential programmes on meta-cognitive skills are also widespread (e.g. learning about learning).[4]

However, lack of good central information and data gathering about alternative credentials makes it difficult for both providers and consumers to make decisions.[5] Because of these factors, it's also an area where the unscrupulous can—and do—prey on marginalized groups.[6]

> While gaining in popularity, these new programs are not without significant problems. Many of the new private sector providers struggle to deliver consistent quality in learning design, assessment and outcome certification, and their instructors have varying levels of competency. They are fast and nimble, often at the expense of learning efficacy, and they generally lack formal accreditation. All of these factors combine to present an opportunity for accredited higher education institutions whose core competencies are firmly established, provided they can adapt and rise to the challenge.[7]

The good reputation of an institution such as UNI can help it stand out in this field. As a major state university, we also have the opportunity to help advance alternative credentialing across Iowa and the region by calling for coordination and support at the state or federal government level: quality assurance, financial aid, data collection, helping potential consumers locate appropriate programs, and data on return on investment.

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[3] Lorenzetti, "Why Alternative Credentials are Critical to Institutional Success" (2016).

[4] Kato et al.

[5] The Credential Registry attempts to collect information about reputable programs, and provides the Credential Finder tool to search for opportunities: https://credentialfinder.org/. But it is not an exhaustive resource.

[6] Marcus, "Credential Chaos: Growing 'maze' of educational credentials is confusing consumers and employers" (2021). Notes that fakes and scammers are diluting the market, and that consumers may have trouble finding reputable programs worth their investment.

[7] Fong et al, "Demographic Shifts in Educational Demand and the Rise of Alternative Credentials" (2016).

II. Terms and Definitions

One of the difficulties in any discussion of alternative credentialing is that of definitions. There are so many terms and structures in use by so many different organizations and institutions that it becomes confusing. Whatever structure UNI adopts for administering alternative credentials, it will be essential for UNI to develop a local taxonomy early in the process that will clearly classify what the student can expect to gain from any particular offering.

First, what is alternative or micro-credentialing, very broadly?
- An alternative or micro-credential is not a traditional degree, like a BS or MBA, but credit-bearing credentials could lead to one through "stackability."
- Alternative credentials are **not** majors or minors, although a multi-semester stackable certificate path may resemble a major or minor quite closely. A major or minor is part of an intentional path to a degree; a certificate might be stackable towards a degree but can be pursued independently.
- An alternative credential always requires a shorter time commitment than a full degree, even sometimes as little as one workshop session; hence the other common term, micro-credential.
- The delivery method for an alternative credential can be highly variable—it might be in-person, distance, hybrid, self-paced, asynchronous, a MOOC with optional testing and grading, etc.
- At the conclusion, the student should always expect some tangible form of evidence of evaluation and completion.
- Alternative credentials may be developed or delivered in partnership with an organization independent of UNI, but in these cases it will be important to make our role in the partnership clear to the student: Did UNI develop the content? Or does UNI endorse the content developed by the independent organization with enough confidence to append its name to it?

Here are several different suggested ways to classify alternative credentials in a taxonomy or matrix suited to local needs; more could easily be devised, and UNI might choose to focus tightly on just a few types of alternative credentials in the early development of a coordinated program. We will be using these definitions throughout this report.

1. Classification by credit level. By this, we mean very narrowly: does it receive academic credit hours that can go towards a degree granted by the university, or not?[8]
- Academic: credit-bearing, stackable, can lead to a degree, appears on the official student transcript. (i.e. sub-baccalaureate for- credit certificate)
- Enhancement: non-credit, co-curricular/extracurricular, recognition (i.e. UNI COB badges)

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[8] Terminology in this section from the "Microcredentials and Digital Badges" model; see bibliography.

- Post-traditional: non-credit, continuing education, professional development (i.e. CEUs for classroom teachers)
- Emergent: non-credit, new, experimental (i.e. subscription-based learning that could occur pre-enrollment through post-graduation)

2. Classification by time commitment/delivery method:
- Single class, one meeting (i.e. workshop)
- Single class, multiple meetings (i.e. a single course, a skill-based short course)
- Group of courses over a semester (i.e. academy or boot camp)
- Multi-semester group of courses (i.e. a certificate path)

3. Classification by level of participant expectation
- Learning: Structured; not measured (i.e. self-led courses, product knowledge, training sessions)
- Experience: Not measured; unstructured (i.e. events, membership, volunteering)
- Validation: Measured; validated (i.e. learning & assessment, portfolio evidence)
- Certification: Industry recognized, validated achievement or culminating experience (i.e. industry certifications, license, terminal credential)

4. Classification by what credential the student receives to certify what they learned[9]
- Badges are the optional visual/digital representation that the credential has been earned. Usually badges accompany a credential that is a short program of study or represent the demonstration of a targeted set of skills. May or may not be credit bearing.
- Continuing Education Unit (CEU) generally indicates fulfillment of a professional postgraduate requirement, whether for a specific skill or an elective. Often a professional organization will track the commitments and completions of its members.
- Non-credit Certificate: Credential awarded by an institution (educational or workplace) for completion of a noncredit educational program. This includes boot camps and military and employer training programs with clearly articulated learning outcomes.
- Stackable credit certificate: Transcripted credential awarded by an educational institution for completion of a sub-baccalaureate credit-bearing educational program; the certificate is in addition to the earned credits on the student's transcript. Usually less than one year in length.
- License: Credential awarded by a state or federal governmental agency for demonstration of skills in a specific occupation. Sometimes awarded for completion of an educational program. Often requires work experience in an occupation. May be in partnership with or delivered by an institution of higher learning.

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[9] Terminology in this section from the Rutgers model; see Van Noy et al.

- Apprenticeship: Credential awarded after completion of structured educational and workplace program based on industry and occupational standards. May be in partnership with or delivered by an institution of higher learning.

For example, UNI might offer a post-traditional credential for educators delivered in the form of a short skills-based course and resulting in three Continuing Education Units credits. Or we might offer an enhancement-style course for improving time management for students, as a one-shot workshop resulting in a badge. At a higher commitment level, consider the model of the UNIFI credentials: a group of courses resulting in a stackable credit certificate that could be combined with other certificates to result in a degree. Professionals might seek, for example, a multi-semester stackable credit certificate in data management to enhance their existing degree and perhaps build towards a complete graduate degree. Flexibility and a broad range of offerings can position UNI for success.

III.   Structural Proposals

Positioning UNI as a reputable regional leader in alternative credentialing is a goal which can be achieved by building incrementally on our existing strengths and offerings. Initially, what we are calling the "Consultant Model" builds the necessary oversight and governance framework to collect, consolidate, and administer existing alternative credentials and to create pathways for the proposal and development of new programs. As our expertise and offerings grow in tandem, a visionary second phase that we are here calling "Forever Panther" can build on this foundation to focus on content and delivery, constructing a portal that incorporates alternative credentialing into a highly coordinated, easily accessible, modular lifelong learning program.

A. Phase One: The Consultant Model: Oversight and Governance

What is the consultant model for alternative credentials at UNI?
- **The consultant model** proposes an initial pathway to a more unified, sustainable, and vibrant alternative credential program at UNI. This approach is intended to give departments and programs **flexibility** to develop alternative credentials that are **marketable** to students and non-students. It also distributes the responsibility of alternative credentialing to the appropriate content-specific departments/programs while providing those departments/programs with **support** and **guidance** by **connecting** them with resources and existing structures and processes.

What types of alternative credentials does the consultant model support?
- The consultant model would support **academic** alternative credentials (i.e. credit bearing, stackable), **enhancements** (i.e. co-curricular and extracurricular recognitions such as UNI CBiz badges), **post-traditional** alternative credentials (i.e. continuing education, professional development), and **emergent** alternative credentials (i.e. subscription-based learning such as the Forever Panther Model proposed below).

How would the consultant model work?
Under the consultant model, there would be three main parties involved:
- departments and/or programs
- an Alternative Credential Consultant
- an Alternative Credential Advisory Board

The creation of alternative credentials would begin with **departments and/or programs**. During the creation process, departments/programs may choose to work with the **Alternative Credential Consultant** to determine its feasibility and explore funding sources. The Alternative Credential Consultant is not intended to serve as a gatekeeper of alternative credentials, but rather the position is designed to provide support to departments/programs during the creation and issuance of the credential.

The graphic above illustrates an example of how digital badge shapes could be used to distinguish different types of micro-credentials.

Once conceptualized, the alternative credential's pathway would be determined by whether it is for-credit or not-for-credit. If the alternative credential is for-credit, it would follow the existing curriculum processes before moving to the **Alternative Credential Advisory Board** for approval. After approval, the Alternative Credential Consultant would assist the department and/or program in developing and issuing badges (if needed), promote the credential, and assist with the maintenance of records.

If an alternative credential is not-for-credit, it would go directly to the **Alternative Credential Advisory Board** for approval. The advisory board serves to ensure the quality of micro-credentials. As with for-credit alternative credentials, the Alternative Credential Consultant is available (if needed) to provide support to the departments/ programs proposing the credential during the creation process to determine its feasibility and explore funding sources. After the not-for-credit alternative credential has been approved by the advisory board, the Alternative Credential Consultant would assist the department and/or program in developing and issuing badges (if needed), promote the credential, and assist with the maintenance of records.

Illustration 1.1 Creating a New Alternative or Micro-Credential
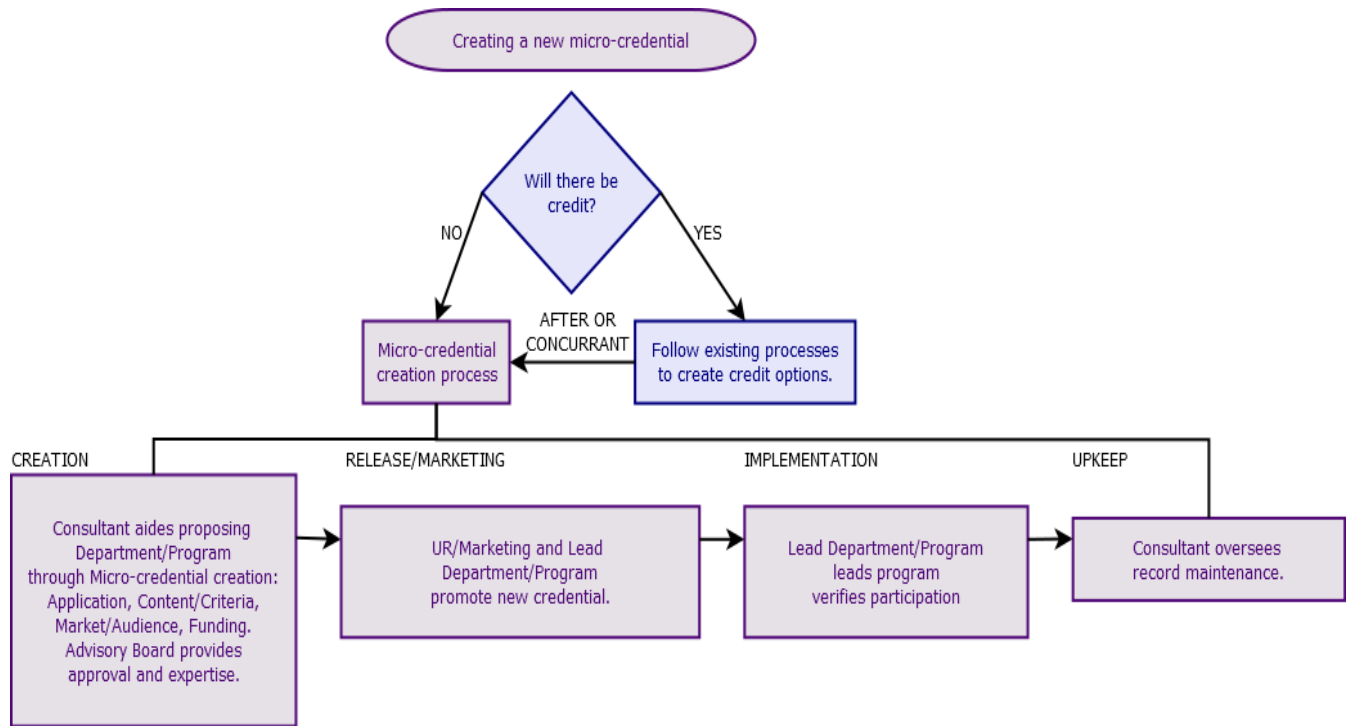
Structures, Duties, and Responsibilities

Departments/Programs

Under the Consultant Model, departments and programs initiate the creation of alternative credentials. During the creation process, they may choose (if needed) to collaborate with the Alternative Credential Consultant to determine feasibility and to explore funding opportunities. Departments/programs will develop a proposal which will either go through the curriculum process or to the Alternative Credential Advisory Board for evaluation. After approval, departments/programs are responsible for delivering, executing, and verifying the completion of alternative credential activities. It is also the responsibility of the department/program to ensure that accreditation or licensure standards are met.

Structure
The Consultant Model will not impact the structure of the departments/programs.

Departments/Programs Responsibilities
- Develop and submit proposal
- Develop and execute alternative credential activities
  (i.e. A faculty member in Math who delivers a 4 hour workshop on Data Analytics is responsible for developing the curriculum, leading the training, etc.)
- Secure funding (with support from consultant, if needed)

- Determine feasibility (with support from consultant, if needed)
- Promote alternative credential to relevant audiences (with support from consultant, if needed)
- Verify completion of alternative credential activities
- Ensure accreditation and professional standards are met

Alternative Credential Consultant

The Alternative Credential Consultant serves as a guide to departments/programs and acts as a liaison[10] with departments, internal, and external constituents. Although the Alternative Credential Consultant will assist and provide support for all alternative credentials at UNI (i.e. market research, marketing, organizing registration, and billing processes), they are primarily responsible for the quality and maintenance of not-for-credit alternative credentials, as for-credit alternative credentials are vetted through existing curriculum processes and recorded in the Registrar's Office.

Structure

Colleges and universities across the nation have used a variety of models to structure the role of the Alternative Credential Consultant. We will offer several possible structures designed to support the Consultant Model, detailing the benefits and challenges of each. Regardless of the structure implemented, we recommend providing administrative support to the person(s) overseeing alternative credential work at UNI.

1. *Alternative Credential Consultant.*

This model assigns one primary person to facilitate a unified and vibrant set of alternative credential offerings at UNI. Naming one person to oversee this work ensures consistency in alternative credential processes and makes identifying who to reach out to for assistance with alternative credentials easy. The position is supported by the Alternative Credential Advisory Board, which will provide the Alternative Credential Consultant with necessary feedback and ensures a variety of voices are included in decision making processes.

Below we suggest several possible places to locate the Alternative Credential Consultant, briefly explaining the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

a) Online and Distance Education (ODE). The ODE has existing infrastructures in place which will make it easiest for this work to begin. The Alternative Credential Consultant primarily assists with not-for-credit alternative credentials and market research, marketing, as well as organizing registration and billing processes for all alternative credentials, which corresponds with the existing role of the ODE. If located in the ODE, consistent communication for departments/programs regarding for-credit alternative credentials would be

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[10] Recommended offices and programs with which the Alternative Credential Consultant may act as a liaison include (but are not limited to): Financial Aid, the Registrar's Office, Office of Business Operations, Instructional Technology, Admissions, and University Relations, as well as any departments/programs offering alternative credentials.

important.

b) Office of the Provost. Locating the Alternative Credential Consultant in the Office of the Provost gives the Alternative Credential Consultant easy access to much of Academic Affairs including the Registrar's Office, Library, and all the Colleges without tying the position to a particular division or department. If located here, a strong partnership with the Office of Online and Distance Education (ODE) , would be important.

c) The Registrar's Office. Given the importance of record-keeping to a vibrant alternative credential program, it makes sense to locate the Alternative Credential Consultant in the Registrar's Office. If located here, a strong partnership with ODE and consistent communication with departments/programs would be important.

2. *Co-Consultants*.

This model appoints multiple consultants, allowing each consultant to draw on the expertise of their office, location, and/or position on campus to develop a robust alternative credential program at UNI aimed at various student audiences. This model would require collaboration and coordination between the consultants to ensure unified processes. We recommend appointing three co-consultants located in the ODE, Provost's Office, and Registrar's Office. The consultant in the ODE will focus primarily on credit and not-for-credit alternative credentials and credentials designed for upskilling and continuous learning. The consultant located in the Provost's Office will work closely with departments/programs to design for-credit, co-curricular alternative credentials focused on enhancing the skill set of degree-seeking students at UNI. Finally, the consultant located in the Registrar's Office will oversee the record keeping for all alternative credentials at UNI. Based on this model, the co-consultants collaborate on the development of a shared vocabulary for alternative credentials, criteria for feasibility of alternative credentials, the marketing of alternative credentials, and the assessment procedures for alternative credentials. All three co-consultants serve on the Alternative Credential Advisory Board.

Alternative Credential Consultant(s) Responsibilities
- Develop criteria for determining feasibility of alternative credential offerings
- Assist departments/programs in determining feasibility
- Assist departments/programs in developing and issuing badge (if needed)
- Assist departments/programs in exploring funding sources
- Assist department and advisors in promoting alternative credentials
- Coordinate with UR/College Marketers on image design
- Serve on Alternative Credential Advisory Board
- Maintain alternative credential vocabulary and consistent communications with customers; assist departments/programs in applying appropriate terminology to their project.
- Assist in the maintenance records for alternative credentials

- Build badge in system (i.e. Credly, Badgr, etc.) (if needed)
- Maintain alternative credential badge webpage
- Assist in the development and collection of appropriate standardized metadata on the skills and competencies students have demonstrated as a component of earning the alternative credential.
- Investigate and facilitate departments/programs in finding alternative credential options that open pathways for students with a diverse set of backgrounds, needs, and career goals
- Recommend innovative strategies, through alternative credentials, to enhance access to education for a diverse student body
- Ensure alternative credentials are meaningful and relevant to advance an individual's career path

Alternative Credential Advisory Board

The Alternative Credential Advisory Board would consist of several co-chairs,[11] the Alternative Credential Consultant(s), two student representatives, as well as representatives from multiple divisions on campus. The primary responsibility of the Advisory Board would be to oversee the approval of not-for-credit alternative credentials. The Advisory Board will work closely with the Alternative Credential Consultant(s) to develop campus-wide terms and definitions for various alternative credentials, as well as create and oversee the proposal process, criteria for evaluation, and assessment of alternative credentials. The Advisory Board helps establish unity across our alternative credential offerings, and facilitates vibrant, innovative, and equitable alternative credential pathways across campus.

Structure
- Co-Chairs from the Office of Online & Distance Education and the Provost's Office/Academic Affairs
- Alternative Credential Consultant
- Representatives from academic colleges and the graduate college
- Student support representation: Career Services & Student Success and Retention
- Research & Sponsored Programs
- Advisors

Responsibilities
- Work with the Alternative Credential Consultant to maintain alternative credential vocabulary
- Collaborate with the Alternative Credential Consultant in creating criteria for the determining the feasibility of a alternative credential

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[11] If the one-consultant model is implemented, we recommend appointing co-chairs from complimentary offices. For example, if the consultant is located in ODE then the co-chairs of this committee would be from the Provost's Office and Registrar's Office. If the co-consultant model is implemented, we recommend assigning the co-consultants to co-chair this committee.

- Investigate and facilitate department and programs in finding alternative credential options that open pathways for students with a diverse set of backgrounds, needs, and career goals
- Recommend innovative strategies, through alternative credentials, to enhance access to education for a diverse student body
- Ensure alternative credentials are meaningful and relevant to advance an individual's career path

Examples of Possible Alternative Credentials

Illustration 1.2 UNI College of Education: Classroom Ready

Universal Precautions /Blood Borne Pathogens Certification	Mandatory Reporter of Child Abuse and Dependent Adult Abuse	Completion of Level I Courses
High Risk Behaviors and Substance Abuse Training	SING Background Check	Professional Development Workshop

This College of Education **alternative** credential is a hypothetical example of a program designed for existing undergraduates. It combines outside certifications, existing course-work, and unique UNI experiences to provide a valuable validated certification for UNI students wishing to serve as substitute teachers before degree completion.

Illustration 1.3 Undergraduate Researcher
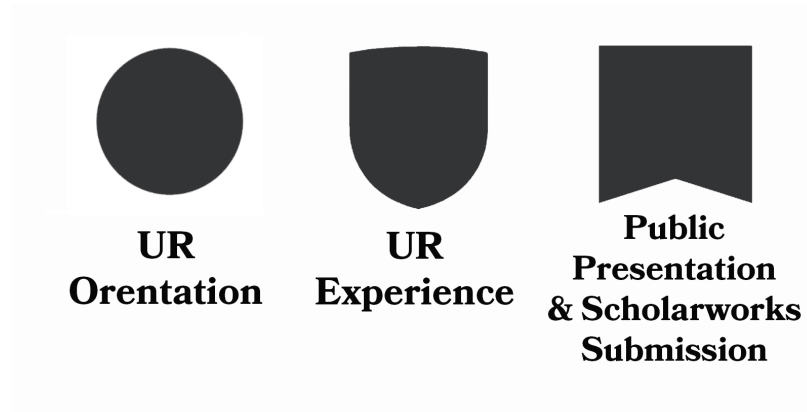
UR is an example of a UNI collection that includes multiple levels of badges to earn a title or certificate.

Illustration 1.4 Workshop for Iowa Department of Natural Resources Staff

Computer Science Department Pearl & Computer Modeling Workshop for Iowa Department of Natural Resources Staff is an example of UNI working with an outside industry to create a new training and marketing with a group of people who can benefit from our expertise but do not need a degree. This might be a one time workshop or a continuous offering.

Illustration 1.5 College of Business Big Data Financial Series
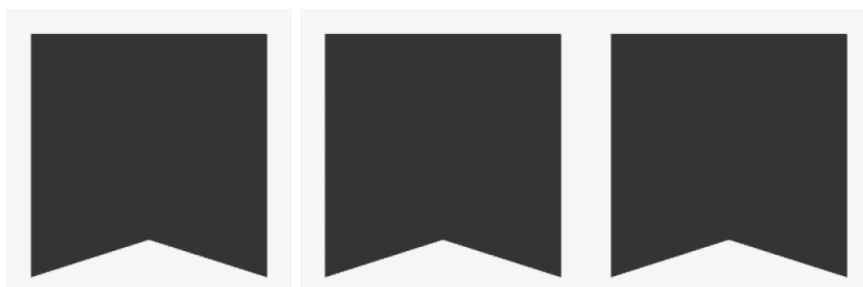
College of Business Big Data is an example of an ongoing series that could attract professionals from many different individual businesses/sectors.

What are some positive benefits of the Consultant Model?
- The model utilizes existing structures which will allow for quick and easy adoption by UNI's campus community. The creation of alternative credentials remains in the hands of departments/programs and, if for-credit, follows familiar, existing processes and procedures.
- The Alternative Credential Consultant(s) and Advisory Board provide additional support to those using our current structures. The consultant(s) and board ensure alternative credentials provide high quality, innovative, and relevant learning experiences to students by making sure the requirements needed to earn the alternative credential are clearly defined across campus.
- The model is flexible and allows for both academic-and non-academic units to issue alternative credentials.

B. Phase 2: The Forever Panther Model: Content and Delivery

What is the Forever Panther model for alternative credentials at UNI?

The **Forever Panther** model creates an **online portal and content platform** for students, alumni, and the general public (i.e., users) to access a vibrant alternative credential program at UNI. Users would use their existing Panther ID login or register for one in order to access the portal to the three tiers of curricular offerings. Forever Panther could offer micro-credentials, credit-bearing courses, badges, and non-credit courses in a three tier system. These tiers could include:

Tier One: Panther Unlimited: a repository of 5 to 15 minute asynchronous learning modules that address a variety of curricular, extra-curricular, and non-curricular information. Some content would be self-contained and non-credit bearing whereas others would be bundled into badges (Credly or self-created digital alternative credentials) and/or offered up to .25 credit. Subscription/fee based.

Tier Two: Panther Premiere: a repository of asynchronous and synchronous learning opportunities, such as mini-classes, sprint academies, and workshops (can be online, F2F, or hy-flex). Can be bundled into badges and/or would be .25 to 1 credit hour credit. Taken and paid for à la carte.

Tier Three: Panther Prime: a repository of full 3-hr learning (i.e., traditional class) asynchronous and synchronous opportunities (can be online, F2F, or hy-flex). Panther Prime is also where the certificates/licensure credentials are located, making it the tier that content from Panther Unlimited and Premiere stack towards. Taken and paid for à la carte.

Credits obtained through the various tiers could stack toward alternative credentials (e.g., badges and certificates) and degrees. This approach provides students with a **one-stop shop** for a variety of curricular, extra-curricular, and non-curricular information and learning experiences.

Each tier produces stackable credits that encourages the user to seek higher credentialing the more content a user engages with. That is students, alumni, and the general population would use the services to move through curricular pathways: non-credit content ◉ badges ◉ certificates ◉ degree/licensure (although users could enter into this process at any level).

This creates a **multi-tiered educational model** that provides opportunities for recruitment, alumni/new student engagement, and educational outreach. And it has the potential to become a **self-sustaining, passive revenue generating** operation for the university as well as the flagship "this is what makes UNI great" program.

Why the difference between subscription-based and à la carte offerings?
> The intent of Forever Panther is to create brand identification and loyalty for UNI from students, alumni, and the general population.

Students in their first year could be automatically signed up for Panther Unlimited. By providing students with the service and integrating it into their 1ˢᵗ year (and throughout their time as students), it increases the likelihood that it will become their preferred destination for education-seeking within and beyond their college experiences. Student subscriptions to the service could be paid for from a new fee (e.g., $5-$10 per year) ensuring that the service is always running at a budget neutral position. As students graduate and become alumni, the university could ask graduating seniors to continue their subscription to the service (e.g., $5 per month or $50 per year).

Students, alumni, and the general public who use Panther Unlimited service will be encouraged to seek content in Panther Premiere and Panther Prime (i.e., upselling). That is, at the end of all video content in Panther Unlimited, connections to higher-cost content and credentials could be marketed to the viewer, increasing the likelihood that they will pursue alternative credentials and badges for a fee. It also increases the likelihood that alumni and the general population would be inclined to see UNI as a place to reskill/upskill (e.g., "I already have 4.5 credits, I might as well take a couple of classes and get this certificate"). Panther Prime and Premiere content can be accessed without a Panther Unlimited subscription, but the university could put in incentives to increase the likelihood of multiple engagements (e.g., the purchase of a Panther Prime workshop comes with 1 free month of Panther Unlimited membership).

This combination of subscription based and à la carte offers a variety of contact points and selling options. Although the student fee ensures the model never runs at a deficit, the potential for students to purchase content in Tiers 2 and 3, and of alumni and general population to subscribe to Tier 1 and purchase content in Tiers 2 and 3, ensures that the model becomes a revenue generating part of the university.

What is the content of Forever Panther? And, who would produce it?
> Forever Panther's content would be produced and managed based on the tier.

Tier One: Panther Unlimited content would consist mainly of 5-15 minute asynchronous learning modules. Most content would be learning-centered and non-credit, but some groups of content would be bundled into badges (which could be assessed a fee or not to badge). Content could include modules such as:

- Self-Care and Mental Health (e.g., "5 Ways to Reduce Test Anxiety," "10 Tips to Beat Depression")
- Career Services (e.g., "Pro Tips for Acing an Interview," "3 Things to Do on your Cover Letter")
- Academic Content (e.g., "Philosophy in Five Minutes," "7 Most Terrifying Creatures in

the Ocean!)
- Lifelong Learning (e.g., "What is Compound Interest?" "Saving for your First Home")
- Student Success (e.g., "10 Tips for Excelling your First Year," "Getting the Most from Your Internship"

Content in Panther Unlimited would be produced by the faculty and staff on campus who are already producing this type of content. For example, in addition to (or instead of) Career Services offering multiple workshops and F2F meetings about job placement, they could create this content and put it into Panther Unlimited. Content that was created beyond normal duties could be purchased for a small fee (e.g., $50) so the university would own the intellectual property. Given our university has state-of-the-art digital media production and editing facilities, this content could be produced as a part of students' learning opportunities (i.e., at little or no additional cost). Content in this tier would need very little to no faculty to oversee it and would require little additional expenditures in this regard.

Tier Two: Content in Panther Premiere would consist of asynchronous and synchronous learning opportunities, such as mini-classes, sprint academies, and workshops (can be online, F2F, or hy-flex). These would be topic specific and connected to existing or emerging markets (e.g., leadership institutes). Faculty who created content for Premiere would be paid at a rate commensurate with the credit associated with it. Much like how distance education pays faculty for the coursework (i.e., $3000 for a new 3 hr. course and then the university owns the intellectual property) the Premiere content would be purchased from faculty and staff. For example, a .5 credit bearing course would be purchased for 1/6th of a 3 hour course (i.e., $500). At that point, the university would own the intellectual property and could offer it as much or as little as it needed. If faculty needed to oversee the course (which not all content would require), they could be paid based on credit hour. So, to extend the example, a faculty member would be paid 1/9th of their salary for a 3 hour course would, instead, be paid 1/6th of 1/9th of their salary to oversee .5 credit-bearing Premiere content (and/or, it could be bundled into enough credit hours as to be a part of their regular course rotation).

Tier Three: Content in Panther Prime would consist of full 3-hr learning (i.e., traditional class) asynchronous and synchronous opportunities (can be online, F2F, or hy-flex). These are courses that would typically be offered through distance learning. In this case, these classes would also be a part of the stackable system into micro-credentials or degrees. Courses would be bought from faculty and faculty would be paid to oversee them under the current distance and continuing education guidelines.

What are the challenges of Forever Panther?

Forever Panther will require careful planning and consideration in order for it to achieve its potential. Considerations would include:

- Payment system: how would the university maintain a system of payments? Would we need to partner with a credit card company, bank, or other financial institution to

achieve a secure payment system? Consultation with the Senior Vice President for Finance and Operations is recommended.

- Less than 1-hr credit courses: currently, the university does not offer courses that are less than 1-credit hour. This precludes distance learning and alternative credentialing from offering workshops, mini-courses, sprint academies, or other types of curricular offerings that would be offered at less than 1 hour credit. Accreditation and academic bodies will need to be consulted.
- Credit Upkeep: if content users can obtain .25 credits here, .5 credits there, and a few badges over the course of 1, 5, or 10 years, how will the university track and credential (or not) those students? And, who will keep track of this information since some alternative credentials (e.g., badges) might be non-credit bearing? Would we need to partner with a third party platform (e.g., Credly) to make this viable? Consultation with the Registrar's office is recommended.
- Ongoing Content Creation: As any social media creator will confirm, the viability and financial success of any content creator is directly tied to their ability to develop quality content in a fairly rapid manner. It would be vital for the program to begin with a large amount of content from the beginning (otherwise, it will look like a content desert) and be regularly updated and added to in a fairly quick manner (i.e., quicker than the current curriculum process). However, based on generated revenue, it would be possible to incentivize faculty and staff to create content on a regular basis.
- Competition: other subscription and paid forms of certificates, alternative credentials, and badges already exist and have established market share. However, Forever Panther offers two competitive advantages: 1) Price: LinkedIn Learning ($39 per month) and Coursera ($59 per month) are prohibitively expensive for newly graduated students (currently enrolled students can obtain these services for free). 2) Access to Market Share: Due to the previous point, Forever Panther can establish itself as the go-to destination for learning in and beyond campus as user familiarity is a primary predictor of product use.

What are the positives of the Forever Panther model?

The benefits of the Forever Panther model are numerous. First, as a marketing tool, it allows the university to assure prospective students and their families that the university has resources dedicated to their success within and beyond the classroom. Students and their families are increasingly budget conscious and want to be sure that a university experience will translate into higher earnings. The content and form of Forever Panther provides a clear artifact for university relations and marketing to point to and say, "What makes UNI better than our competitors is our ongoing commitment to develop your (child's) career while they are a student and a graduate." This is a service that no other university offers and one that would make us stand out as a first choice among competitors.

Second, it provides students with resources that can increase their chances for success (i.e, increasing retention). From mental health and self-care resources to student success, Forever Panther provides quick and easy content that students can put into practice. By encouraging

students to sign up for the service, and integrating it into their lives, the university ensures that there is no student issue that is not addressed with a variety of content.

Third, it offers an "excuse" to keep in touch with alumni and solicit donations. Nationally, only about 8% of alumni give back to their alma mater. Instead of cold-calling a person at 5:30 PM and interrupting their dinner to ask for money, Forever Panther obtains money through its subscription services which acts as a de facto donation. And, there's nothing that prevents the university from integrating "If you liked this video, consider donating" messaging into the Forever Panther Content.

Fourth, it provides a way for non-students to still enjoy the educational services of UNI and, importantly, for the university to monetize those experiences. Instead of people in the general population feeling that they have to pick between their career or being a student (or fitting in a part-time student status into their work lives), Forever Panther allows them to obtain a variety of credentials at their pace, budget, and convenience.

Overall, there is the potential for Forever Panther to transform UNI's engagement with prospective students, current students, parents, alumni, and the general public while providing clear revenue benefits. Most importantly, it provides a flagship program that is unique to our campus and allows our university to distinguish itself among competitors. By doing so, it ensures that UNI becomes a destination for traditional students, (what we may consider) traditional distance education students, and a newly created market of micro-engaged learners who consume content as it fits into their lives.

V. Conclusion

As we said at the beginning of this report, alternative credentialing is a viable strategy for increasing enrollment and revenue, broadening an institution's reach and influence, and remaining nimble and relevant in a rapidly changing landscape. For students and potential students at any phase in their lives and careers, alternative credentials offer flexibility and help them meet their specific targeted educational goals for lifetime learning. Alternative credentials offer both UNI and our students exciting new pathways forward.

UNI has several built-in audiences that can provide us with early pathways for marketing alternative credential options. We have over 120,000 living alumni, with concentrations in business and education; over 9,000 of these alumni on LinkedIn are already linked to Alumni Relations. Iowa preK-12 teachers, whether our own alumni or not, are a group required to pursue continuing education for license renewal, and soon we will have alumni of UNI's two-year paraeducator program who may want to advance their careers to the next level. Other audiences are professionals seeking additional credentials, current students seeking more targeted credentials, and current or prospective students already taking non-degree or zero-credit courses.

UNI can be positioned as a reputable regional leader in alternative credentialing by building incrementally on our existing strengths and offerings. Beginning with the "Consultant Model," we could build the necessary oversight and governance framework to collect, consolidate, and administer existing alternative credentials and to create pathways for the proposal and development of new programs. Optionally, as our expertise and offerings grow in tandem, the visionary second phase that we are here calling "Forever Panther" could build on this foundation to focus on content and delivery, constructing a portal that incorporates alternative credentialing into a highly coordinated, easily accessible, modular lifelong learning program.

In our discussions there were a number of considerations that we felt would be important to work through as we move towards optimizing alternative credentialing at UNI. Addressing these questions would be essential foundational work in the "Consultant Model" phase whether we go on to implement "Forever Panther" in part, in, whole, or not.

Development of content:
- Who pays for the development of content? Is creating an alternative credential like creating a course, or is it a work-for-hire, or is it part of the job for some people?
- A related question is who holds the copyright in such material and what happens if the creator or recorder of the content leaves UNI.
- Who can teach these classes or courses? Are there limits on who is qualified to do the actual instruction?
- Third-party content is already part of credentialing in some units and departments. How should third-party content be assessed and then integrated into our offerings?

- Quality control: how do we ensure that a UNI-badged credential always means something significant?
- What is the legal environment? Are there state and Board of Regents requirements that must be met, or do our existing alternative credentials already meet these requirements?

Marketing:
- Marketing internally is needed to ensure awareness of credentialing offerings by advisors, understanding of the proposal process, etc.
- Marketing externally is needed to reach target consumer audiences. For both of these functions, we need:
    - A website consolidating and marketing information about all alternative credentials.
    - An improved course catalog. Integration of alternative credentials into the catalog drives traffic both ways, from alternatives to standard credit-bearing credentials and vice-versa. The course catalog needs to be not just updated but re-envisioned as a web of possibilities that a student or consumer can explore through hashtags and metadata.

Administrative and technical support
- Tracking of credentials for both credit students and non-credit consumers
- How alternative credentials are noted on credit transcripts
- Registrar processes for enrollment, record-keeping, awarding credentials
- Payment processes, and tracking subscriptions if we adopt the Forever Panther model
- Tracking lifelong learners through phases of involvement with UNI
- Detailed processes for proposing and approving credentials

We recommend some initial goals for this overall project, in whatever way it is implemented and led:

Things that can be done now, before the official launch of a program:
- Start to collect basic information on all current UNI micro-credentials and begin to construct a basic umbrella website.
- Begin work on course catalog revisions; collect aspirational examples and develop goals.
- Work with the Advising FWG to ensure the information gathered is useful for their proposed revisions to advising at UNI.
- Focus in particular on building a foundation that will support alternative credentialing in the directions recommended by the Health Sciences and Data Sciences FWG reports.

Year one:
- Collect additional information on existing alternative credentials at UNI, construct a public website/repository, and work with the registrar to create consistent reporting and record-keeping
- Work with the colleges and faculty to develop a system for alternative credential ideas to be proposed, classified, developed, and implemented

Year two:
- Develop a consolidated program and marketing plan
- Grow connections on campus: give presentations to departments, participate in community engagement day
- Grow connections with the community; become proactive in locating credentialing needs and linking these needs to departments that can meet them.

VI. Bibliography / Further Reading

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Appendix I:
Selected Peer Models

Selected examples demonstrating how to develop a program:
- **State University of New York's** Micro-Credentials at SUNY page: This page discusses how Micro-Credentials at SUNY was developed, including press releases and task force reports. A few key takeaways include: a) one of their first steps was to create a [searchable directory for micro-credentials](), b) UNI may consider adopting the guiding principles they established for micro-credentials, and c) UNI may consider using the criteria they established for adopting [micro-credential software applications]().
    - https://system.suny.edu/academic-affairs/microcredentials/
- **University of Montana's** Micro-credentials: This page describes the history of the pilot program, the process for submitting a proposal, and how the micro-credential program is administered. This program uses a four-step process to launching a micro-credential program and faculty are responsible for issuing badges to students.
    - https://www.umt.edu/umonline/services-and-support/microcredentials_faculty/

Selected examples of websites:
- **University of Denver** Micro-credentials and Badges: This page is their Registrar's landing page that markets their micro-credential programs to potential students and also includes a link to the proposal form for faculty. This program demonstrates a clear and simple way to explain micro-credentials to learners and provides an example of different classifications of badges.
    - https://www.du.edu/registrar/programs/microcredential.html
- **Miami University (Ohio)** Micro-credentials: This program is focused on providing micro-credentials to working adults. This webpage markets the program to students/learners, includes information for industry leaders and employers, as well as a link to the proposal form for faculty. The proposal form is easily accessible for faculty and is a simple, yet thorough process.
    https://www.miamioh.edu/regionals/academics/elearning/campaigns/microcredentials/
    Selected examples of micro-credentials program specifically designed with EDI in mind
- **University of Texas** Micro-credentials: The pilot program identifies low-wage majors as well as "which majors enroll disproportionately large numbers of students of color" to pair specific skill-based micro-credentials with majors to help increase students earning potential post-graduation. This program also demonstrates how to develop micro-credentials programs with the support of grants.

Appendix II:
Professional Organizations and Conferences

- **The Credential Registry** collects information about reputable programs, and provides the Credential Finder tool to search for opportunities.
  - https://credentialfinder.org/
- **UPCEA (University Professional and Continuing Education Association)** is the major professional org for professional continuing education, and includes Alternative and Non-Degree Credentials as one of its focus areas.
  - https://upcea.edu/alternative-and-non-degree-credentials/
- **EAB (formerly known as the Educational Advisory Board)** offers webinars in this area, including this one: "Demystifying Alternative Credentials and Providers: Opportunities and Threats."
  - https://eab.com/event/pae-2022-roundtable-demystifying-alternative-credentials/
- **CHEA (Council for Higher Education Accreditation)** has a great deal of information on efforts towards quality assurance for alternative credentials (type "alternative credentials" in their search box).
  - https://www.chea.org/impact-alternative-credentials-and-alternative-providers-higher-education-and-judgements-about
- **The Conference Board** has a topic page on credentialing
  - https://www.conference-board.org/topics/credentialing
- **AACRAO (American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers)** has a standing Alternative Credentials Work Group.
  - https://www.aacrao.org/get-involved/current-work-groups/alternative-credentials-work-group

Appendix III:
Existing Alternative Credentials at UNI

This list is not exhaustive, but rather offers an example of the variety of micro-credentials already being offered at UNI. Currently across UNI, programs and departments are offering badges, certificates (general education, undergraduate, graduate, and advanced studies), and endorsements, As explained in the report, we recommend compiling an exhaustive list of micro-credentials at UNI and developing an online, searchable directory.

Badges and Distinctions
- College of Business Badges: 16 badges and 5 collections are offered.
- University Honors Program: University Honors or University Honors with Distinction.
- Undergraduate Studies: Graduation with Distinction in Peer Education.

Certificates
- General Education Certificates: 4 offerings are available.
- Online and Distance Education Certificates and Endorsements: 13 offerings are available.
- Undergraduate certificates: These are offered in many departments and programs across the university. An exhaustive list of these offers needs to be made available.
- Graduate Certificates: Example: Communication and Media MA Program: 5 certificates are offered.
- Advanced Studies Certificates: Examples: Clinical Mental Health Counseling, Superintendency, Principalship

Other
- Certified Nonprofit Professional (CNP) credential
- For credit and not-for-credit workshops: Example: Geographic Alliance of Iowa summer workshops.