CASE STUDY #5

WELLSPRING INITIATIVE PHASE II

BRIDGING THE GAP

MAKING SKILLS VISIBLE FOR LEARNERS AND EMPLOYERS

PROJECT REPORT

Wellspring is a multi-year initiative of the 1EdTech Foundation and IMS Global Learning Consortium aiming to accelerate the adoption of an education-to-work ecosystem based on open technology standards. Wellspring envisions an environment where educators and employers can collaborate on education curricula focused on skills, learners control their skills-based achievements through secure and verifiable digital credentials, and employers can find highly qualified talent based on their verifiable credentials. The initiative establishes proof points through research, practice, and demonstration as a roadmap for talent ecosystem stakeholders to achieve digital transformation based upon proven open standards. See the Wellspring Initiative for more information.

This case study shares the practical experiences of the participating teams of the Wellspring Phase II Project as it relates ways to use competency framework deliverables as a foundational mechanism to communicate the accomplishment of skills in an academic credential to employers seeking talent in a particular job role. Two teams are showcased, University of North Texas/TD Ameritrade, and Team St. Louis, to demonstrate how different institutions are using competency frameworks to signal what a holder of the credential will know and be able to do to hiring employers.

SKILLS VISIBILITY AS A SIGNAL FOR HIRE

With the advent of skills-based hiring, both employers and academic institutions are navigating the identification, prioritization, validation, and communication of skills to foster a robust career and continuous learning trajectory.

The Wellspring project provided a key foundation for the digitization of skillsets through the development of competency frameworks that can be linked and aligned to demonstrate the relationships between learning and earning in skills pathways.

Visibility of skills is key to matching the potential workforce with employers that are seeking talent. It is imperative for workplace equity and economic vitality that educational providers empower individuals to maximize their achievements and convey their skills to advance professionally.

The intentional process of identifying competencies, linking learning outcomes, and documenting achieved competencies associated with academic credentials, makes the knowledge, skills, and abilities of completers more transparent.

The scaling and broadcasting of these skills require a competency infrastructure, a combination of technologies to digitally capture and present the skills, and an institutional strategy.

Through the Wellspring project, the participating institutions took the first steps toward building competency frameworks as foundational infrastructure. IMS Global's Competencies and Academic Standards Exchange® open standard, or CASE®, represents skills as data and enables sharing between technology systems.

This creates the structure necessary to connect the dots between learning and earning opportunities. Capturing the anticipated learning experiences, curriculum, assessments, and accomplished skills is the bedrock toward intentionality, portability, transferability, and visibility of skills.

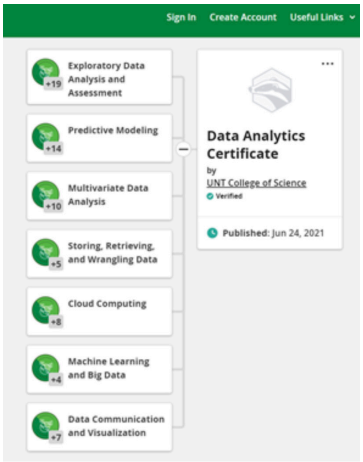
> The IMS Competencies and Academic Standards Exchange® (CASE®) standard facilitates the exchange of information about learning and education competencies and skills. CASE also transmits information about rubrics, criteria for performance tasks, which may or may not align to competencies[2].

Examples in Practice

Two Wellspring university participants, the University of North Texas (UNT) and Maryville University demonstrated different institutional strategies to elevate students with the power of their earned skills.

As exemplars, both UNT and Maryville University capitalized on the project deliverables to activate a skills structure that addresses the "how" and the "why" of skills visibility.

UNT leveraged its participation in Wellspring to define the competencies of their data analytics certificate program and add this offering to the ongoing work to create digital micro-credential pathways. UNT documented the skills associated with the data analytics certificate, the series of digital micro-credentials and used the badge issuing platform Badgr and Badgr pathways to create a comprehensive learner record (CLR). The CLR standard from IMS Global defines a secure and verifiable learning and employment record that supports academic and workplace recognition and achievements, including courses, competencies and skills, and employer-based achievements and milestones.



UNT worked collaboratively with their business partner TD Ameritrade/Schwab to validate program competencies and then curated the resulting digital records of skill completion into a pathway of demonstrated skills, intermediate micro-credentials, and a culminating credential (see Figure 1).

When students complete the data analytics credential and share it on their job applications, resumes, and social media, their verified skills act as a signal to the marketplace and serve as a currency of value for the job seeker. UNT optimized an existing technology stack of their learning management system, badge issuing system, and open standards to incentivize credential completion, signal employer partners and the industry at large, and establish greater visibility for learners.

Maryville University used a contrasting approach to clearly transmit skills and springboard institutional capacity for verifiable credentials. The academic credentials that were targeted included a Customer Service Certificate and a Certificate in Project Accounting in Construction. Rung for Women and Keely Company were two highly engaged employer co-design partners that contributed to the academic and associated job role competencies.

John Regan, Keeley Company, described that a current industry talent shortage and a company passion for fast-tracking careers, particularly for those who are underserved, were motivating factors in their Wellspring work. Based on the competencies that he knows graduates will master, he plans to hire highly-skilled, well-prepared talent in the difficult-to-fill, specialized Construction Project Accountant role. The project provided access to tools for program and talent pipeline development, the establishment of data standards for structure, and skills mapping to foster skills visibility.

Rung for Women, an organization focused on assisting women toward a career and quality of life, has utilized the Customer Service competency framework to build a curriculum and communicate with potential employers. Learners have agency over their acquired skills, and employer partners can depend on the quality and specificity of the skills needed in the job role. Ultimately, Maryville University has gained and is scaling a process for working with employers to implement skills-based hiring. The University has also deployed transcripts and credit certificates to the blockchain (limited CLR), which has been coupled with leveraging innovative relationships with local employers. Maryville University has catapulted its institution toward empowering learners and employers with the evidence of skills.

Considerations: Building Skill Visibility

The following Wellspring participant team insights offer guidance to organizations that are seeking to substantiate the value and begin to implement a skills documentation strategy.

- Skills visibility requires adjustments in organizational documentation for both education and employers. Clear representations of competencies (knowledge, skills, and abilities) are key to learner-mastered outcomes and alignment of these achieved skills to specific job roles.

- Businesses may be interested in the opportunity to enhance their talent pipeline by capitalizing on skills, but they may not know how to get started. Education providers have experience building curricula and analyzing skills. By working in close partnership, both the transmission and the reception of the skills signals can be advanced with the appropriate audiences.

- While the technology systems, open data standards, and tools for scaling are critical to the emergent skills-based ecosystem, skill visibility can begin with manageable actions such as unpacking degrees and job roles. This is a time-intensive, department and organization-spanning human response; however, the results can lead to rewarding outcomes.

- Equity for individuals in the job market lies at the heart of the movement to unveil the skills that are integrated into academic programs, achieved by learner-earners, and necessary for job roles. Limiting access to jobs based on academic pedigree and social networks minimizes diversity in the talent pool in high-demand, meaningful job roles.

- Micro-credentials, certificates, academic and career pathways, verifiable interoperable learning records, and tools for giving learner-earners control over their skill achievements are not mutually exclusive, but rather synergistic opportunities to respond to the personal and professional learning continuum that extends over a lifetime.

About 1EdTech Foundation

1EdTech Foundation facilitates cooperative investment catalyzing a connected ecosystem of innovative educational products and digital credentials that together accelerate teaching and learning innovation enabling every individual to achieve without limits.

For more information visit https:// www.1edtech.org.

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About IMS Global Learning Consortium

IMS Global Learning Consortium is a non-profit organization that advances technology to scale and improve educational participation and attainment affordably. IMS members are leading suppliers, higher education institutions, K-12 districts and schools, and government organizations that enable better teaching and learning by collaborating on interoperability and adoption initiatives. IMS sponsors the annual Learning Impact program to recognize the impact of innovative technology on educational access, affordability, and quality while developing the leadership and ideas to help shape the future of educational technology.

Learn more at https://www.imsglobal.org.

[1] DeMark, S., & Kozyrev, J. (2021). Enabling pathways to opportunity through a skills-based architecture. Journal of Competency-Based Education, 6(1).

[2] IMS Global (n.d.). Competencies and Academic Standards Exchange.

[3] Badgr. (n.d.) A Comprehensive Learner Record For All A Comprehensive Learner Record For All.

[4] American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRO). (2021). CLR Phase II Report.