

New Research: UPCEA Reveals Key Findings on Alternative Credentials

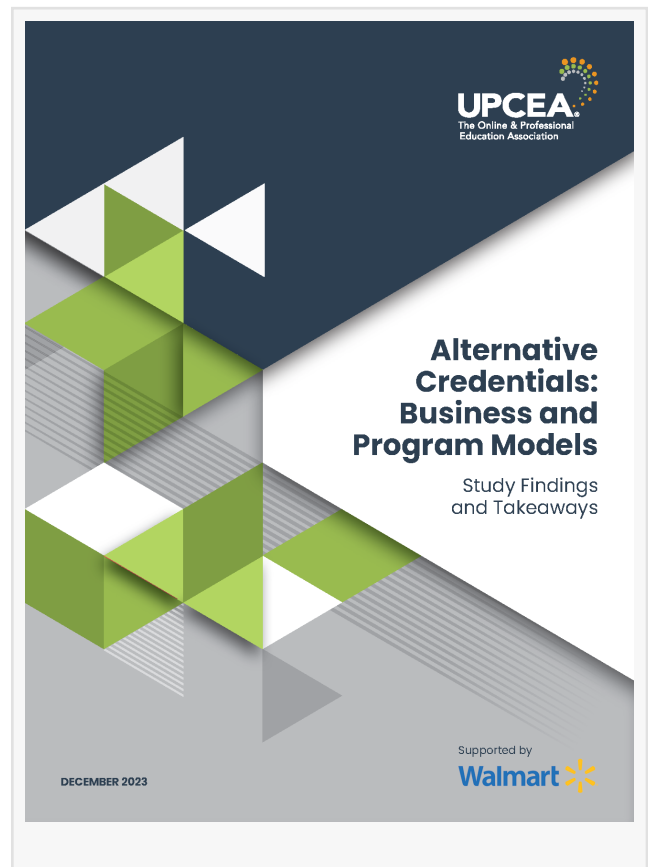
UPCEA shares business and program models insights in grant-funded study

WASHINGTON, DC, USA, January 8, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- UPCEA, the online and professional education association, is proud to share findings and takeaways from a new research study, [Alternative Credentials: Business and Program Models](#). The research, supported by a grant from Walmart, is part of UPCEA's "[Building Capacity, Expanding Pathways](#): Accelerating the Growth of Credential Innovation in Higher Education" project. The project aims to accelerate the development and delivery by colleges and universities of noncredit, short-term credentials for and with local, regional, or statewide businesses.

The study reveals a widespread embrace of alternative credentials among institutions, ranging from non-credit certificates to massive open online courses (MOOCs), particularly within UPCEA's membership, which is predominantly focused on online and professional continuing education.

Despite the acceptance of alternative credentials, a notable finding is that a significant number of institutions do not yet view them as a strategic priority. Institutions with alternative credentials in their strategic plans, however, benefit from greater support and resources for program development. Business models for alternative credentials vary widely. Notably, organizations with longer experience in alternative credentials show more pricing variability than newer entrants. These insights highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of alternative credentials in higher education.

"The study found that while there is increased momentum and support from leadership, many institutions are struggling to establish a consistent and scalable process for developing and pricing alternative credential programs," said Bruce Etter, Senior Director of Research &



Consulting at UPCEA. “Furthermore, nearly three-quarters (71%) of survey respondents didn’t know the gross revenue generated by alternative credentials at their institution. While these data points present significant challenges, institutions can advance these programs by engaging early and often with employers, improving metric tracking and sharing, and isolating the most effective business models for their unique structure.”



Co-Principal Investigators for the grant, Amy Heitzman, UPCEA Deputy CEO and Chief Learning Officer, and Aaron Brower, Strategic Advisor to UPCEA, believe the study’s findings point to just

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*UPCEA's Amy Heitzman and
Aaron Brower*

how important it is for higher education institutions to offer high quality noncredit, alternative credentials to help fill workforce needs. The investigators suggest that given alternative credential variability in quality and impact, it is vital that higher education lead the way.

This research provides a comprehensive exploration of the alternative credentials landscape within higher education, shedding light on the programmatic and business models that sustain them. Findings are based on the results of a survey UPCEA conducted among its membership in the fall of 2023, as well as focus groups featuring key titles such as

Director of Operations Online Continuing and Professional Education, Dean of Extension, and Executive Director for School of Continuing and Professional Studies. Insights gleaned from the focus group sessions underscored the centralization and expansion of microcredential offerings, the vital role of employer engagement, challenges in securing faculty buy-in, and the need for strategic planning in microcredential development. Findings also emphasized the significance of budget allocation and funding, along with the diverse business models currently in practice across institutions.

Alternative Credentials: Business and Program Models is [available for download here](#).

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About UPCEA

UPCEA is the online and professional education association. Our members continuously reinvent higher education, positively impacting millions of lives. We proudly lead and support them through cutting edge research, professional development, networking and mentorship, conferences and seminars, and stakeholder advocacy. Our collaborative, entrepreneurial

community brings together decision makers and influencers in education, industry, research, and policy interested in improving educational access and outcomes. Learn more about us at <https://upcea.edu/> and follow us on social media @UPCEA.

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