

Digital Badges Badge
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May 23, 2014

1. Define “digital badges” and “open badges.”

Digital badges are online badges that users can earn after completing a set of requirements. These badges can be used to represent a specific skill or set of knowledge that the recipient has learned. Higher Education is looking more into these badges to try to help present the co-curricular learning that students learn outside of the classroom. Inside the classroom, the goal would be that students could earn a badge or a series of badges that would “validate” what learning students gained in class and ultimately could be placed as part of a transcript. This digital badging system could help students better showcase/display the types of learning that they have gained from their collegiate experience that is not reflection in the simplicity of the A, B, C, D or F given for a general course. Open badges are basically the same thing as a digital badge but the difference is that open badges are more of a “shareware” that specific companies can award and anyone can earn them. Though badges have a long tradition in many organizations, digital “reward systems” first became popular when Microsoft released Xbox 360.

In 2007, Eva Baker stated at the American Educational Research Association, that there is a need to develop a system that truly recognizes learnings and accomplishments of students outside of grades and the standardized tests. The system would be based upon performance requirements and would measure learning inside the classroom and in the co-curricular setting. In 2011, The Mozilla Foundation and the Peer 2 Peer University published a paper detailing how digital badges can be used as a measure of accomplishment, skill or interest.

In 2010, Bango created a digital platform system that allowed users to receive badges that tied into real world accomplishments and in 2011 The Mozilla Foundation introduced Mozilla Open Badges. In 2011, the Education Secretary for the United States (Arne Duncan) announced a partnership between the Gates Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Humanities, Arts, Science and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory to offer a competition “The Badges for Lifelong Learning.”

2. List at least five fields of meta-data that can be “baked into digital credentials that conform to the Mozilla “open badges” standard.

Many items can be stored in a digital badge as long as the information does not clash with the specified properties. Meta-data is also defined as assertions that can be added to badge data, however it is important that once the badge is issued, the information does

not change to prevent someone from having one issued badge and then going in and changing it to another badge. Several items that can be included in meta-data badge information include: Name of badge, evidence of badge completion, issues of badge, date of badge, expiration of badge if there is one, type of verification method, if the badge is “hosted” or “signed,” description of the badge, description of the organization issuing the badge, list of educational standards that might map back to the badge, etc.

3. Describe the advantages of digital badges over traditional report cards, transcripts, and diplomas.

- Digital badging has several advantages over traditional report cards and transcripts. In our world of higher education where students are given grades in the form of A, B, C, D, or F, that does not necessarily show to an employer what the student learned from the class. Issuing digital badges for specific skills or knowledge can help to show an employer what skills a student actually gained from a class. For instance, a class on Leadership an employer can assume what the student learned, however if the student earned a communication badge, a delegation badge, a leadership badge, a completing a goal badge, a budgeting badge, etc would show exactly what the student learned from their experience in the classroom.
- Our students do a lot outside the classroom as well. Whether it is from serving in a club or organization, participating in a non-profit or service learning experience, etc there is no real way to display what the student has learned outside the class. Institutions can create a co-curricular transcript made up of badges that would better assess all of the opportunities and learning that a student gained while in school.
- These “special” skill sets could really help to set a student apart when they are applying for jobs by truly showing an employer what the student did, gained and learned while in college.
- Badges can also be used as motivation. As people like rewards, badges can serve as a rewards system that could help promote motivation and participation. Just like a player of an electronic video game works to earn special badges, trophies, or top scores, students could be motivated to earn a badge, especially if the value of earning a badge is beneficial to them.
- Badges can also promote informal learning, increase portability of skills across jobs, and provide a greater picture of the learner.
- Badges can also help foster and facilitate the acknowledgment of developing social habits and increase notoriety of the learner by building social capital among peers through community badges. This could also help develop the learner’s reputation and identity in certain academic and professional circles.
- Digital badges could be the next disruptive innovation in higher education. Again, I am not fully certain that the digital badge will ever completely overthrow the incumbent of a traditional transcript and grades, but I do think that it could replace the current system by making it a more encompassing system that engages transcripts and digital badges.

4. List what you see as the three biggest obstacles to the use of digital badges in formal educational settings like schools and universities.

- One major obstacle is encouraging faculty, staff and students that digital badging is beneficial. People do not want to spend a lot of time and capital on creating and earning badges if they do not actually hold any amount of value. So this would probably be a two-phased obstacle. The first is actually having employers understand the value and meaning of digital badges and encourage them to really start using them. The second, once employers are on board is to show faculty and staff that badges are beneficial to encourage them to actually start creating badges for students and lastly showing students that there is value in badges and encouraging them to earn them. I do think however that badges shouldn't require students to go out of their way to earn badges necessarily, but at first, incorporate it in the current curriculum as in this class. An assignment can earn the Digital Badges Badge, etc.
- Another major obstacle that I can see in the digital badging realm is validation, verification and preventing cheaters from presenting false credentials. Because the internet is so open and anyone has access to the internet, my fear is that it is going to be extremely hard to validate badges. I could easily create a fake website acknowledging the existence of certain digital badges and writing the code to provide validity for these "false" badges. If anyone on the internet can do that, there is going to really be a lot of regulation overseeing the badging system to ensure that it is fair and equal for all uses of the badging system.
- My third fear with digital badges is the same fear that I have with online education in general. If students can earn badges online, I am afraid that a major obstacle is engaging students. If a student can stay in their room and earn a badge online, does this take away the human interaction that exists from face to face classroom time? I could see a lot of people claiming that digital badging will deplete the personal human interactions that I feel are extremely important in the higher education realm.
- The last major obstacle is change. Most institutions of higher learning, and especially faculty are afraid of change. One thing that I think is very apparent and runs rampant in higher education is this notion of if it isn't broke don't fix it. Granted I totally disagree with this philosophy, but at institutions of higher learning that have been around for many years, especially with faculty members at the helm of which direction these institutions take, my fear is that this new, innovative technology will be swept under the rug because of faculty members that fear change.

5. List at least five organizations that are using digital badges.

The Mozilla Foundation

The Pennsylvania State University

Kahn Academy

Banso

The MacArthur Foundation

The Gates Foundation

U.S Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) – Badges for Vets Challenge

U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Energy

The Manufacturing Institute – The National Manufacturing Badge System

Peer 2 Peer University