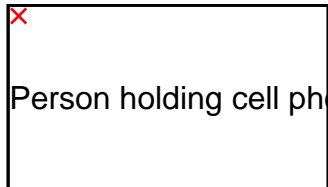




The Conundrum for College Students

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Our HSD and HSE adult ed teachers are working hard with students to help them earn their high school diplomas and equivalency certificates to move onto college and post-secondary opportunities. The academic environment that these students are transitioning to, however, is changing in response to the shifting landscape of work and training, which is creating a conundrum for this generation of college students.


A new report from the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) entitled “The Present and Future of Alternative Digital Credentials” discusses how colleges and universities around the world are slowly creating programs to issue alternative digital credentials, or ADCs, which are meant to show competencies or specialized learning that holders have acquired via study or experience. Schools are doing so in response to other players who are entering the

post-secondary world, like companies and training agencies, that offer courses of credentialed study that are tailored to the preparation students need for the world of work, muscling in on the purview of colleges that have been the gatekeepers to good-paying jobs and the middle class. The main value of an ADC is that it is digital, making it portable, transferable, and easily understood by those outside of the agency that issued the ADC. The ICDE notes that this directly challenges the value of a college transcript, which is not transparent or easily viewable (unless shared by the school or student) and doesn't always clearly spell out what it is that the student knows and/or has learned to do.

The ICDE report still acknowledges the value of a college degree, however, as a means to earning (by some estimates) more than \$1 million over the course of one's lifetime than a person with only a high school diploma. College students, though, face a number of significant financial challenges that have not been present for previous generations. The first is both the cost of a college tuition and the student loans that students take out to pay for the cost of college, both of which have risen dramatically in recent years. Coupled with that is the stagnation in real wage growth over the last 40 years or so for middle-class wage earners. When an alternative (or “disruption”) comes along like ADCs that provide targeted workforce training and perhaps a leg up on those without the specialized training or study of a credentialed program, without the financial burden of student loans and time saved by not pursuing a four-year degree, will there come a time when students ditch traditional college diplomas for alternatives like ADCs?

The conundrum for college students, then, is to choose wisely when it comes to where to study, what to study and receive at the end of doing so, and how much time and money to invest in the whole enterprise.

Report: Colleges must offer digital credentials to stay relevant:

<https://www.educationdive.com/news/report-colleges-must-offer-digital-credentials-to-stay-relevant/547858/> 

When a college degree is no longer a ticket to the middle class: <https://hechingerreport.org/when-a-college-degree-is-no-longer-a-ticket-to-the-middle-class/> 

International Council for Open and Distance Education: [The Present and Future of Alternative Digital Credentials](#) 