Ensuring Educational Excellence and a Career-Focused Experience through a Skills-Aligned Curriculum Map

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University of Phoenix has always been focused on ensuring that students engage in a career-relevant learning experience. In 2019 we began the next evolution of our career-focused experience by aligning skills to course learning outcomes to help close the gap between academic language and employer language. Higher education uses course outcomes to articulate what learners should be able to do after successful completion of a course, but this language is not common or easy for employers and students to interpret together. Our updated curriculum supports course outcomes with a skills language derived from labor market research and designed for real-world application. We believe this helps learners more effectively share their knowledge, skills, and abilities with employers. This work also provides the foundation for current technology enablement like digital credentials as well as future-state strategies such as a comprehensive learner record.
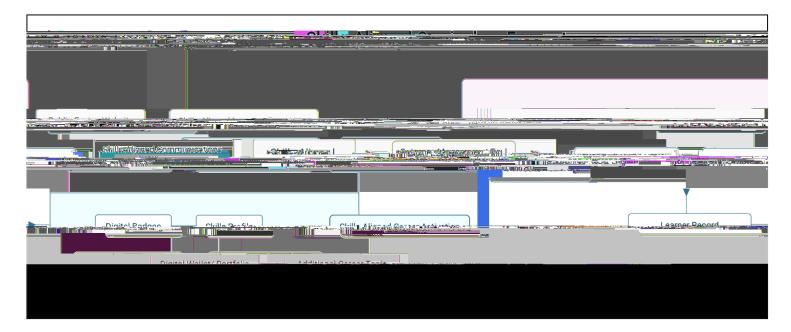
To achieve this next evolution, we had to be committed t

The course learning experience is derived from the curriculum map and ensures that students know the skills that are aligned to the course, and the authentic assessments that measure a skill.

Skills-aligned learning is managed through a web-based outcomes management tool, which supports creating a common language and single source of truth.

Successful skill demonstrations from the classroom are collected digitally. The goal is to capture these alongside other academic achievements earned by a student, such as digital badge or microcredential (achievement of a cluster of digital badges), within a comprehensive learner record.

The following sections describe how a skills-aligned ecosystem provides a vehicle to help students realize the power of their education more quickly and efficiently by validating skill acquisition throughout their educational journey. The foundation of this experience, the digitized skills-aligned curriculum, is evident throughout the career-centric design of courses, measured through authentic assessment, supported with technology, and the source of truth for all university innovation.

The University has always leveraged program-level curriculum maps, but as part of the re-envisioning process, a tighter skills-aligned framework, additional mapping guidelines were enacted in 2019. This work required immense commitment on the part of the college leaders and subject matter experts.

Program curriculum maps leverage a variety of inputs including academic leader visioning, aligned job titles, industry advisory council f

While the design tactics signal to learners the relationship between skills, outcomes, and the career, our authentic assessment strategy ensures that learners are engaging in real-world application. For example, learners don't write a paper about how they would complete a task, instead to demonstrate their mastery of a course outcome and the aligned skill, they create the same artifact that they would be expected to within the career. The skills-aligned curriculum map, specifically the Skill Descriptor, provides the necessary vision for the summative assessment. Learners are guided through their summative assessment using an analytical rubric that specifies performance criteria and level.

The skills-aligned curriculum map ensures that our courses are career-relevant, and learners can leverage what they are learning and producing to either build a portfolio of r

their current careers.

Validated skills-aligned program curriculum maps are uploaded to a web-based outcomes management tool. All units of learning within our skills-aligned courses and programs are organized there with associations to the aligned skills, external standards, and other levels of learning outcomes. Centralizing and digitizing these maps establishes a single source of truth for this information at the university. Sharing tax

Leveraging the 1:1:1 relationship described earlier and referencing the outcomes management tool we can translate learner achievement in the classroom to skills. If a score earned on a summative assessment surpasses a set 'threshold', the learner successfully demonstrates the aligned course-level skill. This is engineered by an automated program that collects and publishes each skill attained to a learner record that amasses all academic achievements – passed courses, demonstrated skills, as well as digital microcredentials – for each learner. This dynamic skills record facilitates greater understanding for learners as to how their learning can be used and enables specific career/skills-based tools to be at their disposal.

Career-activation tools are available to all university learners. These tools help learners assess and match their career interest to programs of study, as well as identify skills and abilities they already possess from prior experience. Each learner can continually reference a personalized   that amasses all self-identified skills along with those demonstrated through classroom achievements, along

with the context in which those skills are applied. Additional features show learners av