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Office of the President**

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Dear Marshall University Faculty, Staff, and Students,

As we continue to shape the future of Marshall University, I am thrilled to share an exciting new initiative in our commitment to student success, workforce readiness, and educational innovation: Marshall's participation in the Nationwide Learning and Employment Record (LER) Accelerator Cohort.

This initiative is more than a program—it is a true innovation opportunity to ensure that every member of our campus community benefits from flexible, recognized, and transferable learning experiences. The LER Accelerator Project aligns with our Marshall For All, Marshall Forever plan focused on affordability, flexibility and life-long achievement.

Why is this important for Marshall?

- **Empowering Learners:** The project will create a robust ecosystem for tracking and recognizing learning—whether it happens in the classroom, on the job, or through micro credential programs. This means students can earn credit for prior learning and noncredit achievements, making their educational pathways more flexible and personalized.
- **Innovative Curriculum:** By unstacking traditional courses into modular, one-credit segments with flexible start dates, we are making education more accessible and responsive to individual needs. Faculty will play a key role in designing and piloting these new models, ensuring academic rigor and integrity.
- **Workforce Development:** The LER Accelerator Project strengthens our ties to industry and community partners, helping us build a continuous talent pipeline and supporting economic growth in our region. Staff and faculty will collaborate with employers and technology leaders to ensure our systems are cutting-edge and secure.
- **Collaboration and Excellence:** Together, we will pilot new processes, host best practice workshops, and develop digital solutions that put Marshall at the forefront of higher education innovation.

What's next?

Over the coming year, you will see new opportunities for engagement, professional development, and recognition of your achievements. We invite you to participate in design thinking sessions, design teams and pilot programs that will shape the future of learning at Marshall. Your insights and involvement are essential to our success.

Let's build the future together.

Thank you for your dedication to Marshall University and for embracing this bold step forward. With your support, we will create a learning environment where every achievement counts, every pathway is possible, and every member of our community thrives.

Sincerely,

Brad D. Smith
President

LER Accelerator

Empathy

Interview Insights

INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY

PROJECT OVERVIEW

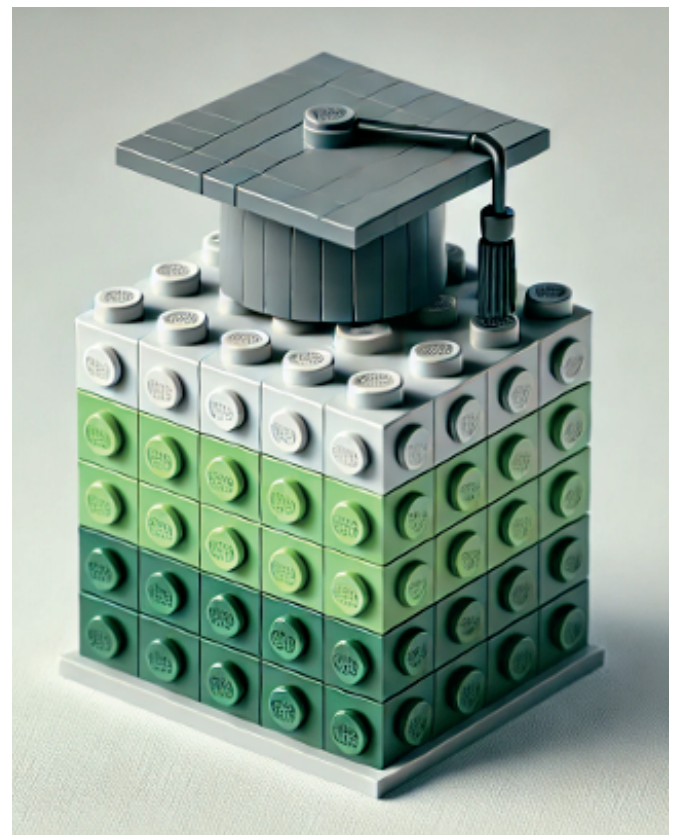
Marshall University's LER Accelerator project is a strategic initiative aimed at advancing the integration of microcredentials and credit for prior learning (CPL) into degree pathways.

The project is designed to create flexible, stackable credential options that enhance accessibility, workforce alignment, and learner mobility, particularly for adult and non-traditional students. This effort is part of the university's broader "Marshall For All, Marshall Forever" vision, which seeks to provide inclusive, learner-centered educational opportunities.

MARSHALL'S LER LEADERSHIP TEAM ACTIONS

The Marshall LER Leadership Team has demonstrated a strong commitment to human-centered design by conducting 20 in-depth empathy interviews, engaging in over 10 hours of focused discussion, and analyzing 317 pages of interview transcriptions.

This comprehensive approach allowed the team to surface and synthesize key themes, pain points, and opportunities directly from stakeholders across the institution.



The interviews reveal a complex landscape with significant barriers and opportunities. Key themes include the need for integrated systems, standardized policies, cultural change, resource allocation, and robust communication strategies. The project team is encouraged to leverage human-centered design principles, foster inclusive collaboration, and pilot modular course structures and digital credential solutions to advance the LER Accelerator initiative successfully.

Thematic Analysis of Faculty/Staff Empathy Interviews

DESIRED IMPACT & GOALS FOR PROVIDING CREDIT TO NONCREDIT LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Expanding Accessibility & Flexibility
2. Creating Stackable Pathways
3. Enhancing Learner Autonomy
4. Supporting Workforce Readiness
5. Ensuring Quality & Recognition
6. Aligning with Accreditation & Compliance
7. Empowering Learners with Verifiable Credentials
8. Fostering Institutional Innovation

SUMMARY

These goals collectively support Marshall's commitment to a learner-centered, innovative approach that bridges noncredit and credit experiences, enhances student mobility, and meets the evolving needs of today's workforce and educational landscape.

CURRENT SOLUTIONS & PRACTICES FOR PROVIDING CREDIT TO NONCREDIT LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Code
2. CLEP Exams & Military Training Credits
3. Faculty & Departmental Approval
4. Co-Curricular Transcripts
5. Professional Development & Continuing Education
6. CodeSignal Pilot for Prior Learning Assessment

CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

The evaluation of new types of non-credit learning experiences is less formalized, and there is a need for clear policies to ensure consistency and recognition. Barriers include staffing limitations, lack of established processes for microcredentials, and the need for cross-departmental collaboration. Financial aid policies currently do not cover microcredentials taken outside of full-time enrollment, and changes to credit structures must consider academic calendar and system limitations.

SUMMARY

Summary Marshall University's current solutions for providing credit to noncredit learning experiences include established PLA codes, CLEP and military training credit evaluation, faculty approval for microcredentials, co-curricular transcripts, professional development offerings, and a pilot with CodeSignal for skills-based assessment. However, broader integration and consistency require further policy development, stakeholder collaboration, and system enhancements.

BARRIERS, PAIN POINTS & FEARS IN PROVIDING CREDIT FOR NONCREDIT LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Systemic & Technical Barriers
2. Policy & Governance Changes
3. Accreditation & Compliance Fears
4. Operational & Resource Constraints
5. Mindset & Communication Issues

SUMMARY OF FEARS

- Concerns about academic rigor, loss of control over curriculum, and the potential for increased workload or complexity are common fears among faculty and staff.
- Anxiety about the sustainability of new initiatives and the risk of short-lived projects that do not deliver long-term benefits for learners and the institution.

These barriers and fears highlight the need for clear policies, cross-departmental collaboration, transparent communication, and a unified strategy to successfully accredit noncredit learning experiences and support learner mobility.

CO-CREATION & IDEAS: INSIGHTS FROM THE “MAGIC WAND” INTERVIEW QUESTION

KEY THEMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Staffing & Dedicated Teams
2. Uniformity Across Departments
3. Financial Accessibility
4. Flexible Course Timelines
5. Clear Communication & Listening
6. Defined Goals, Timelines & Ownership
7. Monetary Support & Grant Opportunities
8. Departmental Buy-In & Collaboration

CHALLENGES & PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

- Change Management
 - Implementing new programs often increases workload and requires significant outreach and administration. Having a dedicated team and uniform processes can help mitigate these challenges.
- Financial Aid and System Integration
 - Integrating microcredentials into systems like Banner can open up new funding opportunities but requires departmental collaboration and technical solutions.

SUMMARY

Interviewees envision a future where microcredentials and alternative credits are supported by dedicated teams, standardized processes, affordable pricing, flexible timelines, and robust communication.

Achieving these goals will require strategic planning, cross-departmental collaboration, and a commitment to listening and responding to stakeholder needs.

IMPROVING IMPLEMENTATION & COLLABORATION BETWEEN ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, IT, & FACULTY GROUPS

1. Direct Engagement & Clear Information Flow
2. Regular, Timeline-Based Updates
3. Open Forums & Feedback Opportunities
4. Comprehensive Implementation Resources
5. Stakeholder Representation
6. Collaborative Policy Development

WHAT WOULD MAKE ADVOCACY COMFORTABLE

- Complete Preparation & Clarity
- Inclusive & Transparent Process
- Demonstrable Demand & Successful Pilots
- Alignment with Governance & Accreditation

By focusing on these strategies, the project team can foster a collaborative environment that supports innovation while maintaining institutional integrity and stakeholder confidence.

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

- 1. Summarize Key Interview Insights**
Compile and share interview feedback to highlight common themes, challenges, and opportunities before moving forward.
- 2. Form Specialized Work Groups**
Establish 3 focused work groups: Accreditation, IT/Technology Integration & Infrastructure/Logistics
Assign pilot departments to each group to test & refine processes in real-world settings.
- 3. Co-Create Ideal Processes**
Map out ideal workflows for: validating & stacking microcredentials, integrating non-credit learning, ensuring compliance with accreditation and regulatory requirements.
- 4. Address Barriers & Develop Support Resources**
Identify and prioritize key barriers, create clear support materials for staff and students, and ensure all system updates are ready before launch to enable a smooth rollout.
- 5. Pilot, Test & Iterate**
Launch pilot programs in selected departments and use results to refine processes, address pain points, and develop scalable solutions for broader rollout.
- 6. Foster Communication & Collaboration**
Establish regular updates and accessible channels for feedback, questions, and resources to support continuous communication and knowledge sharing.
- 7. Engage & Empower Faculty and Students**
Create structured opportunities for faculty collaboration and include students in the design process to ensure offerings are shaped by shared ideas and student needs.
- 8. Monitor Regulatory & Accreditation Developments**
Stay informed about Department of Education and accreditation body updates related to microcredentials and Credit for Prior Learning.
Adjust implementation plans as new guidance becomes available to ensure compliance and sustainability.
- 9. Plan for Sustainability & Scalability**
Develop a long-term commitment and clear game plan to avoid short-lived initiatives by considering resource allocation, staffing, and ongoing support to ensure the initiative's success beyond the pilot phase.
- 10. Communicate Progress & Celebrate Wins**
Develop and share clear, ongoing communications about goals, progress, and outcomes—highlighting successes and lessons learned to build momentum and broader support.

These steps are designed to ensure a human-centered, collaborative, and iterative approach, aligning with Design for Delight principles and the feedback provided by stakeholders throughout the interview process.

APPENDIX A | DEFINITION OF TERMS 1/2

1. Learning and Employment Record (LER):

A system that contains verifiable information about a person's achievements spanning an inclusive range of contexts to include the Comprehensive Learner Record, the higher education component of the LER, in order to provide credentials that represent the skills and competencies achieved by the student during their academic career. These learner records seek to capture, record, and communicate learning when and where it happens in a student's higher education experience in ways that traditional transcripts are not usually able to accomplish. This includes learning outcomes from courses, programs, degrees, and experiences students have outside the classroom that helps develop their career-ready skills and abilities. (AACRAO)

2. Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR):

A digital record that captures and communicates a learner's achievements throughout their educational experience. A CLR can include academic accomplishments, co-curricular activities, and competencies gained outside the classroom, such as career-ready skills. The CLR can compile multiple achievements, including courses, programs, degrees, and Open Badges, into a single, interoperable credential. CLRs are generally viewed as the learning component of a Learning and Employment Record (LER). A learner/earner may receive multiple CLRs throughout their learning and earning journey in both K-12 and postsecondary environments. Institutions can decide to issue CLRs at any point for a learner, as well as issue at major milestones such as degree or certification completion

3. Microcredential:

A narrowly focused area of study where learners demonstrate mastery of knowledge, skills, or abilities. Microcredentials represent competencies that are defined by industry or community partners, granular in nature, and assessed in collaboration with University content area experts. Microcredentials are offered outside of traditional degrees.

4. Digital Badge:

A visual emblem that validates mastery of knowledge, skills, or abilities completed within a microcredential. A Digital Badge carries "meta" data, representing verification of mastery of competencies to an external audience. Digital Badges may be shared on social media and are portable.

APPENDIX A | DEFINITION OF TERMS 2/2

5. Open Badges:

A specific type of Digital Badge that conforms to the Open Badges Standard. Open Badges are verifiable, portable, easily shared by the recipient, and contain detailed information about the achievement and what the recipient did to earn the badge. While not a specific product or platform, Open Badges can be issued, earned, and managed using a certified Open Badges platform.

6. Open Badges Standard:

A free and open technical specification available for adoption that defines how Open Badges are constructed and transmitted.

7. Digital Wallet:

A secure digital application for storing and managing credentials (e.g., certificates, badges, employment records). In much the same way a physical wallet holds money and credit cards, a wallet may contain digital credentials. Legacy terms include digital passports, portfolios, and badge backpacks.

8. Credit for Prior Learning:

Credit for prior learning (CPL) refers to the evaluation and formal recognition of learning that occurs outside of traditional academic settings. It allows institutions to award college credit for skills and knowledge acquired through various means, such as military training, work experience, and informal learning. CPL is often used to save time and money for adult learners by providing pathways to formal recognition of their competencies. (CAEL)

9. Prior Learning Assessment:

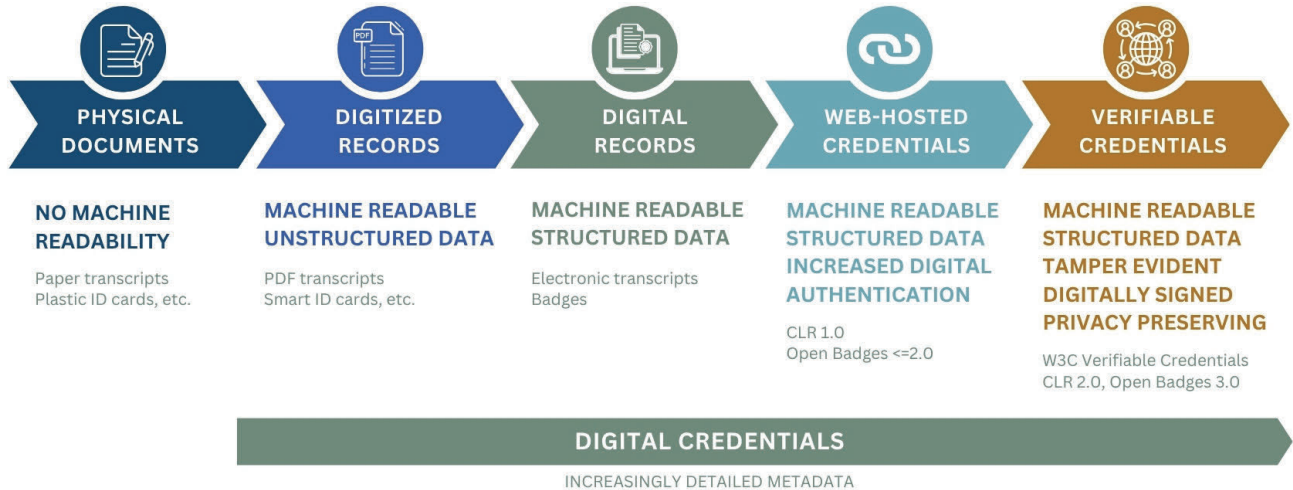
The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) defines Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) as the recognition of learning gained from experiences that may be granted credit or otherwise certified. This assessment is based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public. PLA is an integral part of learning, not separate from it, and is based on an understanding of learning processes. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.

APPENDIX B | LER INTEGRATION



LER TECHNOLOGY & FUNCTIONALITY CONTINUUM

This chart maps the enhanced capability of digital credentials to accurately represent and verify skills through the use of organized, machine-readable data. This functionality allows for seamless integration across various educational and workforce platforms, ensuring that credentials are interoperable, transparent, and reliable. By leveraging structured data, digital credentials can be more easily scaled and applied in diverse contexts, improving their effectiveness and equity in recognizing and validating individual achievements.



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Building a Campus Coalition for LER Success

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

Provide strategic oversight, ensuring cross-campus alignment, authority, and resources to sustain your LER initiative.

CONTINUING, PROFESSIONAL & ONLINE ED

Often lead credential innovation for adult and workforce learners. Bring critical expertise and often manage non-degree credentials not captured in traditional systems.

REGISTRAR & ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

Serve as institutional stewards of academic records and policies. Ensure new credentials uphold institutional integrity and trust.

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, FACULTY & CURRICULUM

Safeguard academic quality and help integrate credentials into curriculum design and learning outcomes.

IT LEADERSHIP

Ensure infrastructure supports credential interoperability, security, and scalability.

CAREER SERVICES & EMPLOYER RELATIONS

Align credentials with employer needs, shaping content and formats that resonate in hiring.

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH & EFFECTIVENESS

Measure impact, uptake, and alignment with institutional goals like equity and student success.

STUDENT AFFAIRS & CO-CURRICULAR PROGRAMS

Capture learning beyond the classroom, using trusted frameworks to credential leadership, engagement, and wellness.

ASSESSMENT & ACCREDITATION

Ensure alignment with quality standards and help anticipate compliance needs.

LEARNING SUPPORT & LIBRARIES

Enhance credential literacy, manage access to tools, and support digital archiving.

ADVISERS & STUDENT SUCCESS PROFESSIONALS

Guide learners in understanding and applying credentials in academic and career contexts.

LEARNER REPRESENTATIVES

Offer vital perspectives on usability and value, ensuring credentials meet real user needs.

OFF-CAMPUS STAKEHOLDERS

Help ensure your LER efforts are aligned with labor market demands and public priorities.



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