AACRAO

LEARNING MOBILITY

Empowering Educational Journeys Beyond Traditional Pathways

A FRAMEWORK FOR RECOGNIZING, VALIDATING, AND CREDENTIALING LEARNING IN ALL ITS FORMS

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Learning Mobility: Empowering Educational Journeys Beyond Traditional Pathways

A framework for recognizing, validating, and credentialing learning in all its forms.

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Our longstanding partnership with AACRAO reflects our shared commitment to fostering student success through collaboration, innovation, and advocacy. We are proud to sponsor the Learning Mobility: Empowering Educational Journeys Beyond Traditional Pathways, which highlights critical work in the space of transfer and mobility—a space that continues to evolve as institutions respond to student needs, workforce demands, and systemic challenges. At CollegeSource, we believe that access to clear, accurate, and student-centered transfer pathways is essential to equitable degree completion, and we're honored to contribute to this meaningful initiative.

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Welcome

Embracing a New Era of Learning Mobility

By Wendy Kilgore, Ph.D.

In your hands is a seminal text - the first comprehensive examination of learning mobility aimed at transforming recognition, validation, and credentialing of learning in higher education. This book represents a collaboration among scholars, practitioners, and policy experts committed to reimagining how U.S. higher-education systems can better serve today's diverse learners.

For too long, the United States higher-education ecosystem has operated under assumptions developed for a different era when learners followed linear pathways through institutions and learning was primarily recognized within traditional classroom settings. The reality of today's learners demands a more flexible, inclusive approach. With many learners balancing work, family, and education while navigating complex educational journeys across multiple institutions and experiences, new frameworks are needed to honor learners' knowledge and support their progress.

Learning mobility stands as a powerful response to this challenge - a learner-centered innovation where systems, processes, and initiatives are designed around learners' needs and interests at every stage of their journey. This shifts focus from institutional convenience to flexible pathways that recognize learning wherever it occurs.

The stakes are high. When institutions fail to recognize prior learning in all its forms, consequences ripple through individual lives and the broader society: extended time to degree, increased costs, and reduced completion rates. These impacts fall disproportionately on first-generation learners, Learners of Color, and economically disadvantaged learners - the very people higher education should empower.

From exploring transfer practices to examining credit for prior learning, from analyzing state policy frameworks to showcasing institutional case studies, this

book's diverse voices and perspectives provide both theoretical foundations and practical guidance. The examination shows how technology, policy, data collection, institutional culture, and practice must evolve together to create systems that value knowledge and skills regardless of acquisition context.

Looking to the future of higher education in an increasingly technology-driven, AI-enhanced world with rapidly evolving workforce needs, learning-mobility principles become essential. Workers' skill sets may change or become outdated, requiring upskilling and reskilling. Educational systems must create flexible pathways that recognize learning throughout a person's life journey.

This book is a call to action and a practical guide for campus administrators, faculty members, policymakers, and advocates. Together, the higher-education community can build systems that truly serve all learners, honoring their diverse pathways, recognizing their achievements, and empowering them to reach their full potential.

Welcome to the conversation.

Introduction
The Evolving Credential Hierarchy

By Carolyn Gentle-Genitty and Taylor Hansen

The traditional credential hierarchy that determines career access and advancement is undergoing extensive transformation.[1] This reality is spreading across industries and career pathways (Namatovu & Kyambade, 2025). Digital and analog models have reshaped how credentials are valued and how work environments function (Kayanja, et al., 2025; Altman, 2007; Collins, 2019). At its core, this challenges the longstanding social-stratification system that has traditionally determined who gets access to jobs and who is better compensated (Cottom, 2019; Gaston & Van Noy, 2022).

Traditional higher education credential systems require re-evaluation. Global expansion, the affordability and enhanced value of digital credentials, innovative self-presentation methods for job seekers, and employer use of real-time employability data are driving this evolution (Credly, 2023). Some institutions pursue one path while other educational providers explore alternatives.

Educational institutions have two choices. They can update their outdated systems or replace them. Institutions that make changes will be better positioned to adapt to the rapidly changing job market in which skills and knowledge are recognized equally, whether they come from traditional education or workplace experience.

Skills-Based Education for a Skills-Based Economy

If the future of work is skills-based, higher education must follow suit. How can higher education effectively facilitate this transition? Institutions lacking substantial resources, brand recognition, or financial reserves may struggle with traditional operational models as learners increasingly demand flexible education and accelerated, workforce-aligned credentials (Mintz, 2025).

For learning mobility to function effectively, all systems must center on *learners*, including policy, practice and technology. This approach makes educational data meaningful across contexts and industries.

[1] *Credential hierarchy* refers to a structured organization of credentials. This organization is often used to indicate credentials that are higher-level than other credentials. Higher-level credentials often grant greater opportunities and privileges.

From Trust to Implementation–Building Effective Learning Pathways

For skills-based approaches to succeed, employers must trust skills acquired through diverse pathways. This requires curriculum/industry alignment via paid internships, integrated certifications and expanded job opportunities. This alignment allows institutions to validate learning, regardless of whether a graduate pursues further education or employment.

The primary challenge is communication. Employers struggle to articulate desired skills while learners struggle to demonstrate their capabilities. Learning mobility removes barriers to progress by creating clear pathways to both employment and continuing education. When effectively implemented, learning-mobility principles enhance higher education's value by accelerating credential attainment while ensuring documentation connects education to opportunity.

Many states and institutions have developed practical approaches to transform how human potential is understood, validated, and connected with opportunity. Learning is a habitual response to situations (Miller, 1973). With changing requirements in the labor market, learning fluidity that encourages mobility becomes essential. The future of American higher education is being reshaped. Institutions will be successful if they reimagine education delivery, redefine their value proposition, and leverage unique strengths.

The Premise of Learning Mobility

This book introduces a framework for recognizing, validating, and credentialing learning in all its forms. It examines how educational institutions can thrive amid demographic shifts, financial pressures and market-driven forces. It focuses on flexible pathways for all learners, regardless of background or circumstances (Mintz, 2025).

The stakes are high. America's economic competitiveness depends on our ability to optimize talent through systems that document and communicate skills effectively, while connecting education to opportunity.

How to Approach the Book

This book is a compendium of information. It includes signposts of the what, why, who, and how of learning mobility. Readers can use the searchable text in this digital format to navigate the book's contents to help them find the information and resources they seek.

As technology rapidly changes, specific mentions of technology have been intentionally minimized. To learn specifics about how institutions can continue to adapt to the changing reality, use, cost, and efficiencies gained through technologies, readers may want to speak with editors, authors, and AACRAO personnel and examine case-study examples.

The information below provides a roadmap of the book. The book opens with AACRAO's definition of learning mobility (page xii), which serves to ground the discussion that follows. From there, topics vary from chapter to chapter, but the goal of the book is threefold:

- recognize learning mobility in its various forms;
- validate the learning and skills presented through learning mobility; and
- activate a reset of credentialing learning.

Recognize

Discussions on how to *recognize* can be found in Chapters 1, 3 and 4. Information and insights are provided by national leaders from Sova, Lumina Foundation, Gallup, WICHE and CAEL. Also included is a case example from Purdue University Global.

Validate

Discussions on how to *validate* can be found in Chapter 2 and Chapters 7 to 13. Information and insights are provided by national leaders from California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, Ithaka S&R, University of Phoenix, and Florida International University. Case examples from Chattanooga State

Community College, Alamo Colleges District, and the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development are also included.

Examples and case studies offered in Chapters 11, 12, and 13 provide starting points for institutional action. Approaches can be personalized, but authors offer examples of how data could be collected, stories of their experiences, and ideas on how to future-proof learning-mobility work.

Credential

Forward-thinking grounds the discussion on 'credentialing' found in the 'Who' Chapters 5, 6, 11 and 15 presented by recognized national leaders such as American Council on Education (ACE) and American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO).

The What, Why, Who and How Sections of the Book

The **WHAT** section defines learning mobility from a policy perspective in Chapter 1 by Juana H. Sanchez. It also presents metrics and impact in Chapter 2 by Lindsey Myers, Zhe Zhao, and Hironao Okahana (ACE).

The **WHY** section describes the needs of learners and the role of postsecondary education in career development and success. It is presented by Courtney Brown (Lumina) and Stephanie Marten (Gallup) in Chapter 3. Patrick Lane (WICHE) and Becky Klein-Collins (CAEL) in Chapter 4 speak to the value of credit for prior learning with a case example offered by Allegra Fowler (Purdue University Global).

Chapters covering the **WHO** section speak to learners and institutions about how to navigate global horizons. In Chapter 6, Julia Funaki (AACRAO) presents information on international learning mobility. This chapter also gives a glimpse into an emerging perspective from international learners in athletics presented by Garrett Seelinger and Ellen Ramsey (NAIA). Included in this section is an examination of military-affiliated learners offered by Michele Spires (ACE) and Abby Kinch (Student Veterans of America) in Chapter 5. What makes this book unique is the attention to **HOW** to respond to changing times and an uncertain

future. Linda Vasquez (CCCCO), in Chapter 7, share processes to influence policy at all levels. In Chapter 8, Janie Valdés (FIU) suggests ways receiving institutions can facilitate learning mobility, and Tammy Aagard offers guidance for sending institutions. Cultivating a culture for learning mobility is discussed by Marc Booker (University of Phoenix) in Chapter 9. In Chapter 10, Wendolyn Davis (Chattanooga State Community College) reminds readers to consider biases in established processes. Chapter 11, by Mike Simmons, explores the critical evolution of Learning and Employment Records (LERs) in documenting, verifying, and communicating learning achievements.

Specific examples of what is taking place now at Alamo Colleges District are shared in the case study by Veronica Garcia and George Railey in Chapter 12. Samantha Dickey of the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development offers a second example in Chapter 13. Guidance on how to bring about systemic change is covered in Chapter 14 by Ithaka S&R contributors Kyle Gray, Betsy Mueller, Madeline Trimble, Emily Tichenor and Martin Kurzweil.

This book aims to ground transfer activities and accelerate support for learners and workers. It closes with Eleanor Brown offering a glimpse into the future.

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About the Authors

Carolyn Gentle-Genitty, Ph.D., is a tenured full professor and the Founding Dean of Butler University's Founder's College, an inaugural role following 20 years of distinguished leadership at Indiana University (IU). At IU, she served in several key roles including system-wide assistant vice president for academic policy, director of the university transfer office, director of university academic policy and programs, director of the bachelor of social work program, and online education fellow. Nationally, she served on the American Council of Education's year-long, task force as ex-officio advising on how to reimagine transfer. She represented her state on the Western Regional Cambridge Evaluation Committee.

She is recognized as a national transfer expert for her leadership on committees, such as the Credit for Prior Learning Model Policy Task Force, Credential Engine Advisory Committee, and Statewide Transfer Leadership Committee. She has played a key role in establishing and overseeing state-wide articulation agreements and representing Cambridge International, while directly shaping and overseeing public policy and laws on higher education and transfer.

Gentle-Genitty has a stellar track record of increasing transfer credit acceptance, creating transfer tools, and improving outcomes like increased associate degree completion, growth in adult populations, and the establishment of more than 85 guaranteed admissions agreements. She streamlined the transfer process, developed pioneering degree programs, and grew IU's first-generation transfer students by five percent and adult learners by 23%. In her most recent role leading university academic policy, the office vetted, approved, and supported the implementation of more than 1,200 credentials and 30 new-to-the-state degrees.

Gentle-Genitty is an alumna of the ACE Fellowship, where she completed a year-long leadership program at the University of Southern New Hampshire and University of Colorado Denver. She is also an alumna of HERS, a national program for women in higher education, and IU's Next Generation of Leaders, a leadership training program.

Taylor Hansen is an executive director of policy and programs at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. He works on the Foundation's programs for higher education and workforce development and on the T3 Innovation Network, which is focused on enabling the digital transformation of the talent marketplace by promoting data interoperability and harmonizing across diverse stakeholders.

Prior to joining the U.S. Chamber Foundation, Hansen worked for the Presidents Forum as a senior advisor where he led the Blockchain Innovation Challenge, in partnership with the American Council on Education and U.S. Department of Education. Additionally, he led the Forum's policy efforts as well as their grant with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Hansen has more than 15 years of policy and government relations experience as well as in project management and providing advisory services to investors. His previous experience includes working for the U.S. House Committee on Education and Workforce, Marwood Group, Center for Education Reform, Career Education Colleges and Universities, and the Institute for Global Futures.

Definition of Learning Mobility

The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) defines learning mobility as "A learner-centered innovation, where systems, processes, programs, and initiatives must be designed around the needs and best interests of the learner of today and the future at every stage of their journey." The following key principles guide this concept:

Learner Centered

Learning mobility places learners' needs and interests at the forefront. Educational systems, processes, and programs should enhance the learning experience throughout the learner's journey, empowering individuals to customize their education to meet their specific goals.

Equitable Opportunities

Learning mobility requires that educational systems enable social and economic advancement for individuals of all abilities, backgrounds, and skill levels. Effective implementation creates clear pathways to both employment opportunities and continuing education, removing barriers that might otherwise limit progress.

Interoperability and Open Standards

For learning mobility to function effectively, technology systems must utilize open standards and common frameworks. This ensures data remains machine-readable, exchangeable, and actionable across different platforms. Such interoperability supports the integration of information from diverse sources, facilitates human understanding, and makes education data meaningful across different contexts and industries.

The Value of Higher Education

When learning-mobility principles are successfully implemented, they enhance higher education's overall value. In today's knowledge-based economy, advanced

skills and experience serve as currency for professional success and economic growth. Education accelerates credential attainment, and accurate documentation and communication of these achievements play a vital role in connecting education to opportunity.