

A “Stackables” Overview



NATIONAL
CONVERGENCE
TECHNOLOGY CENTER

DEFINITION

- Sequential awards that can be accumulated over time to build up qualifications
- May stand alone or build on one another to earn a technical diploma, which can stack into an associate or bachelor's degree
- Moves student along a career pathway
- Slices credentials into smaller pieces

BOOMING TREND

- Short-term certificates grew 151% from 2000 to 2010.
- In that time, short-term certificates' share of all sub-baccalaureate credentials at two-year colleges grew from 16% to 25%.

“Short Term Certificates Boom” Katherine Mangan, November 2014
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Short-Term-Certificates-Boom/149863>

- Sub-baccalaureate certificates awarded by two- and-four-year colleges increased 150% from 2000 to 2014, compared with a 59% increase in associate degrees and a 47% increase in bachelor's degrees.

“Stack those Credentials” Katherine Mangan, September 2015
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Stack-Those-Credentials/232985>

BENEFITS

- Helps students that cannot afford to pay for college full-time for two years (i.e. bite-sized chunks more affordable)
- Gives employers evidence that new workers have mastered specific skills
- Provides milestones that make a degree less daunting and overwhelming
- Boosts school completion numbers by showing that students are gaining marketable skills

BENEFITS

Research by Dr. Sandra Kiddoo,
Mid-State Technical College (WI)

- Worry that stackables will make students leave early – Kiddoo found stackable students are neither less nor more likely to complete an AAS
- Kiddoo compared students who first enrolled in a stackable program with those who did not – those that enrolled in stackable first were more likely to finish

CHALLENGE

If stackables aren't built correctly, they can...

- turn into arbitrary awards with no workforce value.
- make it seem like the system is producing more credentials without making any substantive change.

FIVE STACKABLE STRATEGIES

1. Work with employers to define stackable credentials of value (the BILT)
2. Let student attendance patterns inform the creation of stackables (California analyzed which classes the students took without graduating)
3. Base stackables on demonstrated skills and competencies

“Five Things to Remember When Building Stackable Credentials” Iris Palmer, July 2015
<https://evollution.com/opinions/remember-building-stackable-credentials/>

FIVE STACKABLE STRATEGIES

4. Focus on “momentum points”

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

<https://www.sbctc.edu/about/agency/initiatives-projects/student-achievement-initiative.aspx>

5. Include intrusive advising (students know about the opportunities, school stays in touch with student who left)

“Five Things to Remember When Building Stackable Credentials” Iris Palmer, July 2015

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