



WILLIAM E. KIRWAN CENTER for ACADEMIC INNOVATION

USM Digital Badging Initiative

Context

During this time of disruptive change in higher education, public colleges and universities are being challenged to justify the value of their degrees and credentials, and to produce evidence of return on investment amid budget constraints and the changing character of students. Through the Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation, the University of Maryland System (USM) expands its system-wide capacity to create effective, efficient learning environments that enhance student success. As the first system-level center to conceptualize, promote, study, and disseminate groundbreaking academic innovations, the Kirwan Center is discovering what works and developing strategies aimed at scaling and sustaining the best models to support student success and transform higher education.

Currently, as one component of a broad academic transformation platform, the Kirwan Center is addressing a critical issue: employers are not convinced college graduates are arriving at the workplace with the career-ready skills needed to succeed. While this is likely true for some, it may also be the case that students who actually *do* possess the requisite career-ready skills struggle to synthesize what they have learned and translate their curricular and co-curricular experiences into the specific competencies sought by employers.

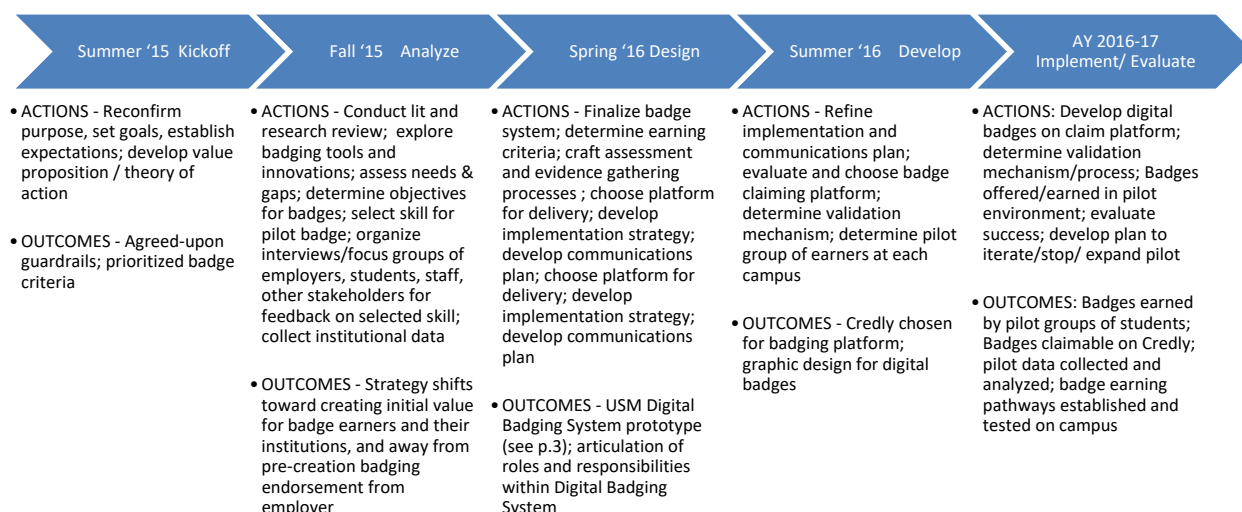
Digital Badging

Since Summer 2015, USM institutions have been working together to design, develop, and explore the feasibility of digital badging. While all USM institutions are eligible to participate, to date the most active institutions have been Coppin State University; Frostburg State University; Towson University; University of Maryland, Baltimore County; the Universities at Shady Grove; and University of Maryland University College. As an innovative way to validate and better communicate graduates' career-ready skills to employers, the USM Digital Badging Initiative focuses on **Problem Solving, Communication, Collaboration, Leadership, Critical Thinking, and Professionalism**.

Badges “make visible and validate learning in both formal and informal settings, and hold the potential to help transform where and how learning is valued” ([MacArthur Foundation, n.d.](#)). And, because they are digital, badges include access to publicly viewable artifacts that not only validate learning, but also provide evidence of that learning, thus allowing badge consumers more insight into exactly what the badge earner did to achieve that badge. Additionally, being digital and openly accessible means these badges can be shared through digital portfolios and social and professional networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn. As a complement to traditional credentials, badges will 1) motivate students to pursue opportunities that will help them become “career-ready,” 2) help students translate their experiences into the higher-order skills employers seek, and 3) differentiate students in a competitive marketplace.

Design Process and Timeline

Using the Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate (ADDIE) instructional design model to inform our process, the work completed/to be completed is shown in phases below. Actions taken during each phase produce outcomes that feed into the subsequent step.



Next Steps

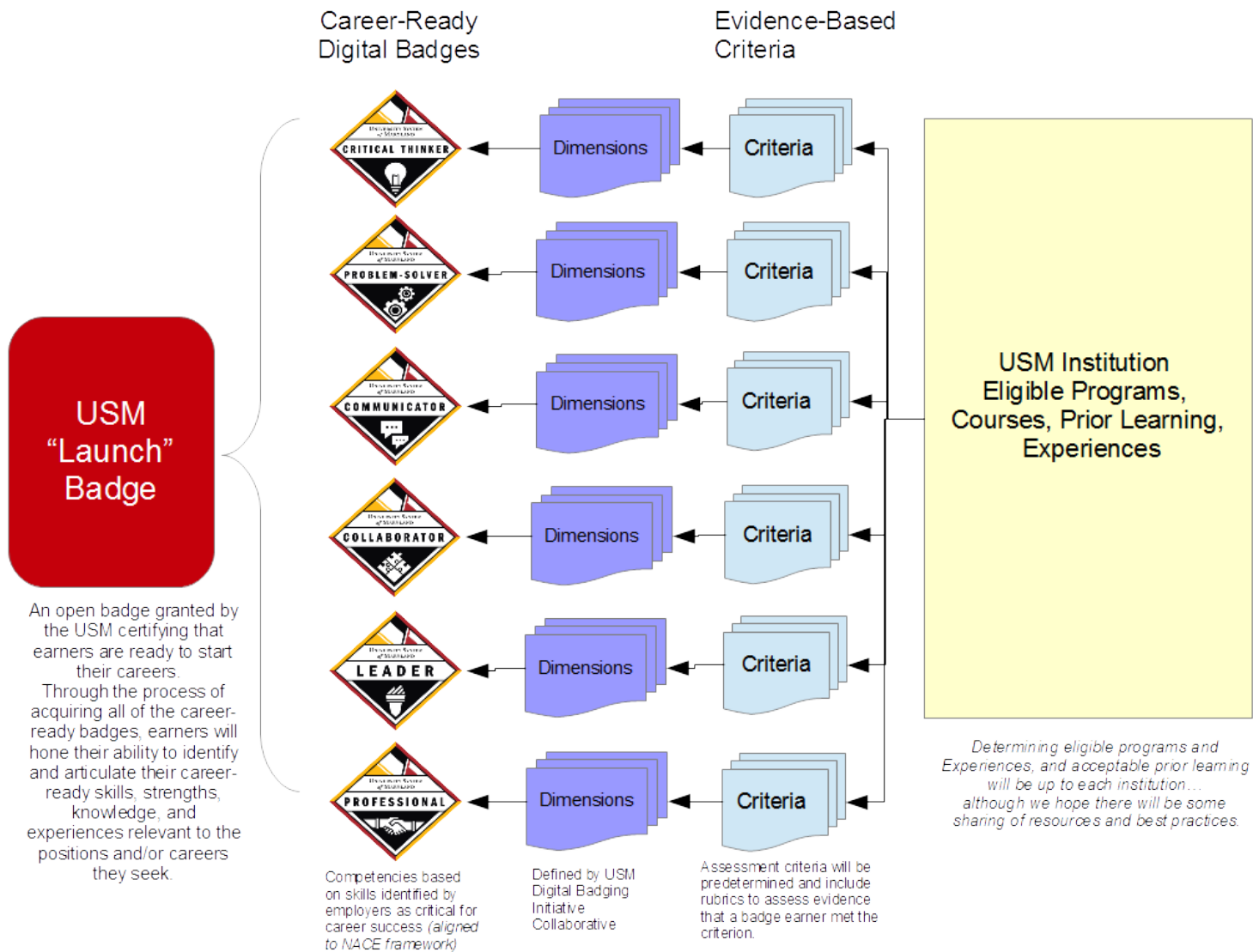
The Kirwan Center is exploring the philanthropic community's interest in supporting a planning grant for the USM Digital Badging Initiative. During the planning period, our aim is to 1) develop a constellation of career-ready badges for testing as a proof of concept, 2) provide students at participating USM institutions with opportunities to earn digital badges, and 3) evaluate whether the pilot is meeting its intended objectives. In addition, we would like to continue to socialize and test the concept of digital badging of career-ready skills with regional and local employers, national leaders in the field, students, faculty, and staff.

We believe badges will complement traditional credentials by providing a better way for students to communicate to employers what they know and are able to do. In turn, badges will help employers make better hires by improving fit and match between students and jobs. With support from the philanthropic community, the Kirwan Center believes the USM Digital Badging Initiative will foster a career-relevant system that benefits both students and employers, and is scalable ultimately to higher education institutions nationwide.

About the Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation

Established in 2013, the Kirwan Center explores—through rigorous quantitative and qualitative research—the interplay between approaches proven to improve student success and the feasibility of implementing those approaches in context. Developed at a system level, the Kirwan Center capitalizes on the USM's position as a microcosm of public higher education and brings real value to the work and the national discussion around academic transformation. The Kirwan Center's research-to-practice perspective provides not only evidence-based models for improving student success, but also proven strategies for how these approaches might be scaled and sustained in a variety of contexts both within Maryland and across higher education nationally. This work by the University System of Maryland William E. Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License CC BY 4.0.

USM DIGITAL BADGE SYSTEM



USM BADGE DIMENSIONS

Name	Description	Dimensions
The Critical Thinker	The CRITICAL THINKER BADGE validates that the earner has demonstrated the ability to analyze and evaluate thinking and commit to constant improvement.	<p>The Critical Thinker excels in the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it by effectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raising vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely.• Gathering and assessing relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively.• Coming to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards.• Thinking open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought.• Recognizing and assessing, as need be, one's own assumptions, implications, and practical consequences.• Communicating effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems.
The Problem Solver	The PROBLEM SOLVER BADGE validates that the earner has demonstrated the skills necessary to resolve complex problems/challenges through exercising sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome challenges. The individual can obtain, interpret, and use knowledge, facts, and data in this process, and may demonstrate originality and inventiveness.	<p>The Problem Solver tackles challenges alone or in teams by effectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Articulating the problem.• Identifying the desired end result.• Brainstorming creative options for achieving the desired end result.• Analyzing and selecting the option that best achieves the desired end result.• Developing a plan of action that will achieve the desired end result.• Enacting the plan of action and adapting as needed.• Evaluating the outcomes in relationship to the desired goals.
The Communicator	The COMMUNICATOR BADGE validates that the earner has demonstrated ability to articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and/or oral forms.	<p>The Communicator expresses thoughts and ideas by effectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using syntax, grammar, and/or vocabulary appropriate to the context and modality.• Ensuring messages are organized, clear, and consistent with any supporting material.• Tailoring the message and delivery method to the topic, audience, purpose, and context.• Reflecting on one's own messages and adjusting as appropriate.• Critically analyzing others' messages.• Engaging diverse and competing perspectives and the ways they influence communication.

Name	Description	Dimensions
The Collaborator	The COLLABORATOR BADGE validates that the earner has demonstrated the skills necessary to be a successful and contributing member of a professional team.	<p>The Collaborator advances the work of a team by effectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulating one's own role on the team and the roles of others. • Integrating team members' diverse viewpoints. • Motivating and supporting others on the team. • Building upon or synthesizing the contributions of others. • Offering ideas, suggestions, alternative solutions, and feedback. • Accounting for one's own assigned role and responsibilities on the team. • Negotiating, managing, and resolving conflicts when they arise.
The Leader	The LEADER BADGE validates that the earner has demonstrated the ability to leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals, and use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others. The individual can assess and manage self and others; use empathetic skills to guide and motivate; and organize, prioritize, and delegate work.	<p>The Leader leverages the strengths of others to achieve common goals by effectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing individual and collective strengths, weaknesses, and capacities to achieve the desired goal. • Engaging diverse or competing perspectives. • Motivating others. • Articulating a vision and strategy. • Organizing, prioritizing, and delegating work, roles, and responsibilities. • Reflecting on how one's leadership affects process and outcomes and adjusting as appropriate. • Reviewing outcomes and assessing implications for future plans.
The Professional	The PROFESSIONAL BADGE validates that the earner has demonstrated personal accountability, effective work habits, integrity, personal accountability and commitment.	<p>The Professional strives for excellence by effectively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking responsibility for one's actions and outcomes. • Examining the implications of one's own behavior and decisions. • Acknowledging mistakes and learning from them. • Following through on commitments. • Persevering in the face of challenges and changes. • Acting with the interest of the larger community in mind. • Evaluating one's own performance over time and adjusting.