

For Immediate Release

February 26, 2024

Contact: Laura Janota, ljanota@hlcommission.org**HLC's Credential Lab Receives \$500,000 Grant for Innovation Center**

February 26, 2024 - To address the growing alternative credential landscape, last fall the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) launched its [Credential Lab](#) to create an approach for the quality assurance of organizations offering short-term certificates and credentials and to develop resources and training on best practices.

HLC was recently awarded a three-year, \$500,000 grant from ECMC Foundation to extend this innovation-focused initiative.

The grant will help jumpstart HLC's Credential Lab Innovation Center, which will offer educational providers from within and outside of higher education a model for ensuring high quality credentials. Like many of HLC's elective services, participation in this initiative will be separate from an institution's accreditation relationship.

"HLC's work reflects the changing marketplace, which increasingly includes short-term certificates and alternative credentials for learners," says HLC President Dr. Barbara Gellman-Danley. "The rapid growth of such credentials is not always accompanied by transparent quality assurance, which is needed to help consumers navigate the wide range of providers and opportunities for lifelong learning."

"With as many as one million unique credentials currently offered in the higher education ecosystem, arbitration regarding rigor, value and market-place acceptability is needed to help ensure equitable student outcomes," said Jacob Fraire, president of ECMC Foundation. "Even as we launch the Foundation's North Star goal to eliminate equity gaps in postsecondary completion by 2040, we have to be vigilant in confirming that the credentials being awarded are meaningful in today's labor market."

HLC has convened [several expert stakeholders](#) to support the development of the Credential Lab. Furthermore, a design team is creating standards and processes for assuring the quality of credential content providers. This quality assurance service will lead to a review against the standards for an endorsement of providers demonstrating the evidence-based requirements.

ECMC Foundation's support will enable the design of the innovation center, which will include programming for organizational change and innovation to effectively design and integrate alternative credentials. The center will also curate a growing body of evidence-based alternative credentialing practices.

HLC's Credential Lab will reinforce effective partnerships throughout the credentialing ecosystem, including collaborations among and between sectors, colleges and universities, employers and

industries, other credential-focused organizations, states, and workforce development organizations. The resources will serve to enhance and promote learners' credit mobility, transferability, and learning recognition. This initiative will also help demonstrate the real and perceived value of lifelong learning for learners, employers and industries, and communities.

According to Dr. Melanie Booth, the executive director of HLC's Credential Lab, "We are collectively in the midst of a large learning and working sea-change, so the Credential Lab is intentionally taking a systems approach to this work by partnering with other leading organizations that are addressing these challenges as well, and by contributing our expertise, leadership, and voice in the conversations about quality providers and credentials for learners and employers."

President Gellman-Danley concludes, "We have always believed in the power of education to change lives. As colleges and universities adapt to demands as well as new learner populations, and as more kinds of providers enter the postsecondary market, there has never been a greater need for responsible innovation, agility, and quality."

About HLC

The Higher Learning Commission accredits approximately 1,000 colleges and universities. HLC is a private, nonprofit accrediting agency. It is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Questions? Contact info@hlcommission.org or call 312.263.0456. To learn more, visit [HLC's Credential Lab](#) or email lab@hlcommission.org.

About ECMC

ECMC Foundation is a national, private foundation whose North Star goal is to eliminate equity gaps in postsecondary completion by 2040. The Foundation's mission is to improve higher education for career success among underserved populations through evidence-based innovation. ECMC Foundation makes strategic grants and program-related investments to support both nonprofit and for-profit ventures, guided by a strategic framework which aims to advance systemic change by removing barriers to postsecondary completion; building the capacity of organizations, institutions and systems; and transforming the postsecondary ecosystem. Learn more about ECMC Foundation by visiting www.ecmcfoundation.org and our parent company, ECMC Group, by visiting www.ecmcgroup.org.

#####