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From Programs to Ecosystems: The New Workforce Imperative for Universities

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Three Structural Shifts

1. Credentials are being disaggregated

Microcredentials • Short-term credentials • Certifications

2. Skills are becoming the currency

Skills-based hiring • Digital credentials

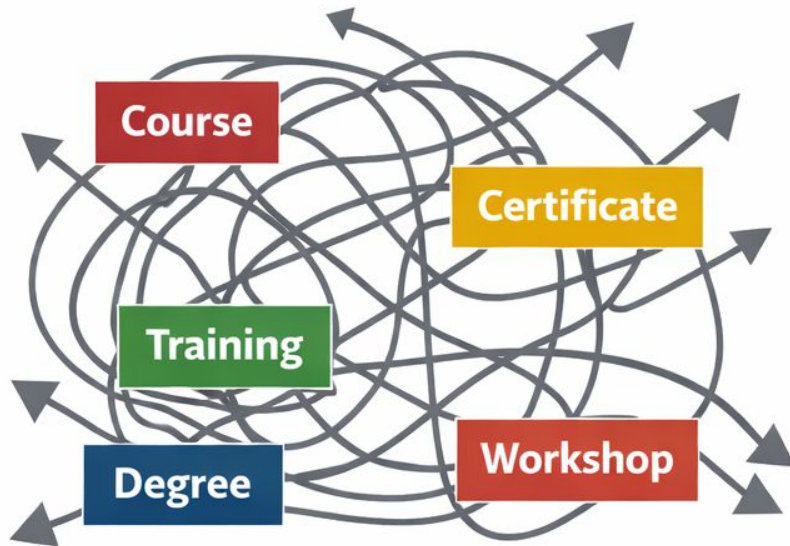
3. Learners are nonlinear

Stop-outs • Career pivots • Lifelong upskilling

From Maze to Pathway

Same Assets. Different Alignment.

Programs



Programs

Ecosystem



Ecosystem

Same Assets. Different Alignment.

How Institutions Are Responding

- Stackable credential pathways
- Embedded microcredentials
- Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)
- Reduced-credit graduate degrees
- Workforce Pell preparation

The Hidden Work: Alignment

Capacity — not creativity — is the bottleneck.

Common Barriers:

- Decentralized employer engagement
- Registrar + PCO policy misalignment
- Faculty ownership ambiguity
- Fragmented credential taxonomy
- Addressing biases and financial models

From Programs to Ecosystems

An Ecosystem Includes:

- Employers as co-creators
- Workforce boards as strategic partners
- Economic development alignment
- Stackable mobility pathways
- Academic + PCO integration

Five Actions You Can Take This Year

- Conduct an institution-wide workforce portfolio audit
- Map existing credentials to regional industry clusters
- Formalize the employer co-design processes
- Align Registrar + PCO policy structures
- Create a Workforce Pell readiness task force

You Don't Have to Do This Alone

UPCEA Supports Institutions Through:

- National research and benchmarking
- U2B credential design framework
- Employer engagement capacity building
- “Getting to Gold” co-creation standards
- Professional development networks

Learn more: upcea.edu

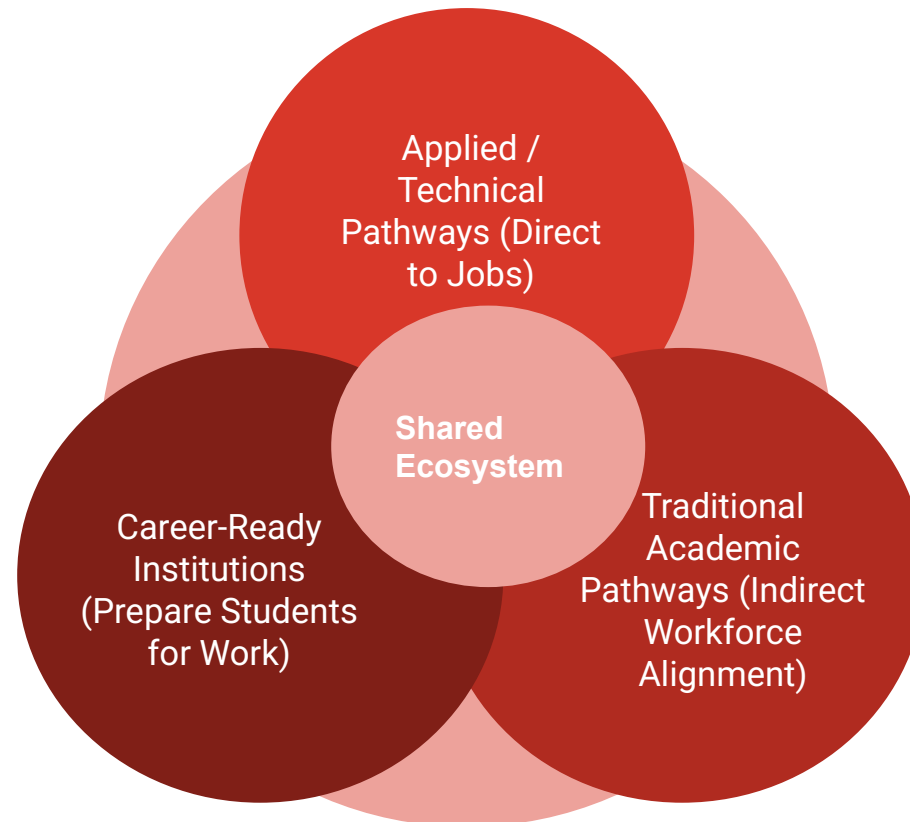
The Real Question

Will we shape our region's workforce ecosystem —
or react to it?

Northeastern Pennsylvania needs:

- Alignment
- Mobility
- Collaboration
- Leadership

Regional Workforce Ecosystem



Call to Action

Opportunity: Move from Parallel Efforts to Coordinated Ecosystem

- Partner across institutions to:
 - Share infrastructure
 - Co-design with employers
 - Align to regional workforce needs

Where could your institution shift from preparing talent... to co-creating workforce solutions?

Top 5 Must-Click UPCEA Resources

Employer Co-Creation

Getting to Gold Framework

Move employers from advisors → co-design partners

 <https://bit.ly/40PTCiV>

Strategy & Alignment

U2B (University-to-Business) Framework

Align programs and credentials with workforce demand

 <https://bit.ly/4sIQeDq>

Policy & Funding

Workforce Pell Readiness Checklist

Prepare now for eligibility, governance, and design

 upcea.edu/workforce-pell

Systems & Language

EERC Nondegree Credential Taxonomy

Align Registrar, PCO, and academic structures

 <https://bit.ly/3NCOg8D>

Research & Practice

Workforce & Employer Engagement Hub

Case studies, tools, and national insights

 upcea.edu (search: workforce / employer engagement)

Start with one and build momentum from there.

Additional Resources

- [UPCEA Membership Matters Overview](#)
- [UPCEA Research & Consulting Overview](#)
- [Sample UPCEA Research & Consulting Project](#)
- [UPCEA Research & Consulting Second Opinion](#)
- UPCEA Employer Engagement and Workforce Themed Snap Poll Infographics:
 - UPCEA Snap Poll: [Workforce Pell Readiness](#)
 - UPCEA Snap Poll: [Corporate Outreach Strategies](#)
 - UPCEA Snap Poll: [Corporate Relationships](#)
- [UPCEA Alternative Credentials: Business and Program Models Study Findings and Takeaways](#)

Additional Resources

- [UPCEA's Building Capacity, Expanding Pathways: Accelerating the Growth of Credential Innovation, A Higher Education Playbook](#), Apr, 2024
- UPCEA Blog: [Accelerating Institutional Capacity for Employer Engagement in Credential Innovation](#), July, 2025
- UPCEA Virtual Forum Blog: [Expanding Institutional Capacity for Employer Engagement in Credential Innovation](#), Oct, 2025
- UPCEA + Collegis [Employer Understanding and Engagement on Non-Degree Credentials](#), Feb, 2023
- UPCEA + Collegis [Unveiling the Employer's View: An Employer-Centric Approach to Higher Education Partnerships and Addressing Employer Barriers to Engaging with Institutions](#), Jan, 20224

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