

# Wearable Credentials: Badging Competencies for Learning and Assessment

Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law

Allison Martin, Clinical Professor of Law and Coordinator, Legal Analysis, Research and Communication, and

Max Huffman, Professor of Law and Director of Online Programs

## Abstract

Best practices for assessment and evaluation (as well as teaching and learning) require that law faculty attend more to *individualized skills and competencies*, which present at a more granular level than larger objectives like “writing ability,” “research skills,” or “knowing the law.” Some of these more granular competencies can be called “commodity knowledge,” for which there is no gain from idiosyncratic approaches followed in different courses. (The Bluebook is the Bluebook; it is not necessary that students be exposed to a variety of styles of citation form.) Finally, *assessing the achievement* of these granular competencies can be difficult in the traditional law school curricular structure. If a competency like “avoiding plagiarism” is taught in a writing course, the overall course grade may not give any information about achievement in any one discrete subpart of the course.

By teasing out competencies that related to *commodity knowledge* and making them subjects of “mini-courses,” student achievement of those competencies can be better tracked. Mini-courses can be designed to produce, on successful completion, a *digital badge* which students may display when asked to demonstrate achievement. In a basic use model, the mini-courses (or proof of prior completion) can be assigned to students to avoid reinventing the wheel across courses with overlapping coverage. For example, when one of us assigns papers as a summative assessment in his online course, he assigns an online anti-plagiarism mini-course the other of us created; students may either complete the mini-course or provide evidence of prior completion.

A more expansive use of badged mini-courses can involve aggregating, or “*stacking*,” badges, to combine competencies to demonstrate the achievement of a higher-order skill or knowledge base. A set of badges including (1) anti-plagiarism, (2) legal research (likely topic specific), (3) Bluebook citation form, and (4) thesis drafting could be stacked to demonstrate achievement in writing a scholarly paper. Students could be required, prior to graduation, to earn a certain number of badges reflecting achievement in a range of competencies – presumably ones meeting institutional educational objectives – that, evidence suggests, are not otherwise met in the curriculum.

One can envision further applications of badges that demonstrate competencies. Technology exists permitting students to broadcast their acquisition of badges, whether in an institution-specific e-portfolio or on a LinkedIn profile. As badges are disseminated, *they can be endorsed* – “*liked*” – by third-parties. Such endorsements (or their opposite) will help to establish the credibility of the particular competency from the particular institution. This process provides *crowd-sourced information about the particular program’s strength* in developing one or more competencies.