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For Immediate Release

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HLC Launches new Credential Lab to Meet a Quality Assurance Need in a Chaotic Credential Landscape

September 18, 2023--The Higher Learning Commission is launching an innovation-focused initiative, the Credential Lab, to help bring clarity to the chaos caused by the tidal wave of credentials available to learners and assure quality in this complex ecosystem.

No longer is the path through post-high school education one-directional. The tidal wave of alternative credentials offered by colleges and universities as well as non-academic providers is flooding learners' options.

At the same time, the workforce continues to identify skill gaps and staffing needs. Colleges and universities are trying to rapidly adapt to meet the needs while furthering their educational missions and building new business models.

HLC's Credential Lab will engage broad stakeholder groups to develop, test, and apply an assurance structure for colleges and universities – and their learners - to know the quality of external content providers.

HLC's Credential Lab will also provide support and resources to facilitate building bridges among postsecondary institutions, external content providers, and employers.

This initiative is partially supported by a grant of \$250,000 from Lumina Foundation.

“As the largest institutional accreditor, we have directly witnessed the rapid expansion of alternative credentials and the confusion and questions about quality and return on investment that has resulted – both for colleges and universities and for learners,” says HLC President Dr. Barbara Gellman-Danley.

“HLC is well-positioned – given our history of scaling quality assurance systems, our more than 125 years of experience in accreditation, and our strategic vision - to provide this much-needed new form of quality assurance of the increasing number of alternative credential providers that are in the market.”

HLC recently named Dr. Melanie Booth executive director of HLC's Credential Lab. Dr. Booth previously served as the vice president of educational programs and engagement with the National Council of State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA), where she led the agency's educational programming, outreach, partnerships, and communications in support of 52 SARA state members and more than 2,300 institutions.

Dr. Booth also served as the founding executive director of The Quality Assurance Commons for Higher and Postsecondary Education from 2016-2018, and as vice president for educational programming at WASC Senior College and University Commission from 2013-2016. Her vast consultation experience includes employability and work-based learning; distance education; experiential and community-engaged learning; credit for prior learning; prison-based higher education; and alternative credentials and competency-based learning.

“HLC has the vision and depth of experience in quality assurance, as well as an important learner-centric perspective. We are ready to build a scalable set of solutions to address a real need for quality assurance in our learn-work ecosystem,” says Dr. Booth.

“This initiative will not only help colleges and universities and their learners but will also provide a trusted and established quality assurance voice in this dynamic landscape.”

HLC will convene a Credential Lab Advisory Board comprised of diverse stakeholders in the credentialing ecosystem to guide and promote the initiative, as well as an evaluation working group of experts in the quality assurance and credentialing fields to design, test, and implement a new evaluation model and process for assuring quality of external content providers.

An institution support working group will also be convened to ensure alignment to the needs of post-high school institutions and learners.

As a membership organization, HLC looks forward to working with external content providers and supporting participating colleges and universities in this dynamic alternative credential landscape.

Dr. Gellman-Danley concludes, “We are eager to help propel institutions forward. As accreditors, we have always believed in the power of education to change lives. As colleges and universities adapt to new pressures and needs, and as more non-academic providers enter the market, there has never been a greater need for quality assurance, innovation, and agility.”

*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.*

***Lumina Foundation** is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision higher learning that is easy to navigate, addresses racial injustice, and meets the nation’s talent needs through a broad range of credentials. We are working toward a system that prepares people for informed citizenship and for success in a global economy.*

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