Jim Fong (00:00):

We really need to look at how do we actually move from a legacy-driven, 120-credit model here to something that's more prepared for the future or more unbundled for the future or more accessible.

Jeff Cobb (00:18):

I'm Jeff Cobb.

Celisa Steele (00:19):

I'm Celisa Steele, and this is the Leading Learning Podcast.

Celisa Steele (00:28):

Welcome to episode 298 of the Leading Learning Podcast, which features a conversation with Jim Fong, chief research officer at the University Professional and Continuing Education Association. He and his research team work in a wide variety of areas, ranging from program identification and development to marketing to enrollment management to changing culture at colleges and universities. A big part of Jim's work at UPCEA is helping university leaders understand the trends impacting higher education and how to develop programs and credentials more appropriate for the new economy. Jim and Jeff talk about the new adult learner, the need for more on and off ramps for higher ed, automation, the role of employers and jobs in shaping education and training, partnerships between associations and academia, and the opportunity for alternative and stackable credentials to play a fundamental role in unbundling education to better respond to the evolving world in which we live and work. Jeff and Jim spoke in March 2022.

Jeff Cobb (01:44):

Now the last time you were on the show, and that's been two years ago now, you and Celisa discussed that one of the things I think the data was showing at that point was the growing need for higher education institutions to really unbundle the traditional degree and to offer alternative credentials. What sort of progress have you seen on that in those two years?

Jim Fong (02:06):

Well, what actually happened here is, pre-pandemic, we had lost a million students in that decade. It was a slow like half a percent, 1.7 percent decline in terms of higher education

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enrollments. Those students didn't magically disappear. And also what happened during the pandemic is we lost another million students. A few hundred thousand have since returned. And now we're facing in 2025, 2030, this demographic cliff. And so we're going to have less 18-year-olds. So, you know, the arrows are pointing kind of in the wrong direction in terms of higher education, and it's not going to get any better. So colleges and universities need to kind of define their strategies, look at their portfolios, look at how they're going to get a larger share of the market if they want to operate at the same level, or they've got to, you know, rethink and reinnovate in terms of how they're going to act differently.

Jim Fong (02:56):

But these students that are sitting on the sidelines—and we also have a higher high school completion rate as well, so we shouldn't be seeing a decline in enrollments until 2025, but we are. So it says that, it's sending a signal to higher education that, you know, the system might be broken some way. What do you need to do differently? And these colleges and universities need to start thinking. Is it the content? Is it the degree? Is it the packaging of the degree? Or what do they need to do to be ready for this new economy? There's a lot of things to really unpackage there. I think some of it comes down to program obsolescence. I think some of it makes a 120-credit degree harder to reach. I think there's less money in the marketplace, but I also think that we're quickly moving to automation.

Jim Fong (03:43):

And, you know, I know that the Great Resignation is saying a lot of things, and we'll talk about that, but that's also another signal to start reinnovating but also to unbundle this 120-credit thing into smaller, bite-size pieces here. People have less money. They're not willing to commit to $50,000 to $100,000 for a degree, if not more. They want to get smaller pieces of that. An institution may get that same amount of money. Maybe they'll have higher costs, but they've got to make it more palatable, more digestible, and more acceptable. Otherwise they're going to face this cliff a lot faster than they expect. And, in fact, we're seeing that the pandemic did a number of things to accelerate that cliff in a different way, but it also opened up a number of opportunities for institutions to be thinking about.

Jeff Cobb (04:30):

And what are your thoughts on trends like Google getting so heavily into creating boot camps, creating certificates. It seems to be a signal that employers are not necessarily getting what they want to be getting from higher education. How do you read it? Some people are saying this is going to be the end of higher education, that Google and these other companies are now doing their own thing. Is the situation that grim?

Jim Fong (04:52):

If you look at what Google is doing and others are doing—IBM and others, Amazon—they're opening up their own kind of university and trainings. They're also redefining the competencies required to do a job. Not every job requires a degree. And so those are all signals that higher education needs to pay more attention to. I also look at it as a byproduct of what happened 10 or 20 years ago. Business and industry wanted colleges to be more accessible. They also wanted more training and education. Higher education kind of snubbed their nose to it a little bit. And they said, basically, training is not something we do. We educate people. And so a real kind of snobbish attitude to take. This whole corporate university movement fizzled 20 years ago. They actually—corporations, employers—really looked to higher education to help prepare their workforce for the Internet era, and higher education sat back a little bit.

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Jim Fong (05:46):

So what these corporations did later on is they came into the back door, through the MOOCs, through a lot of more accessible education, and they built it out while also leveraging the brand of higher education. So that's a big signal here, but it doesn't say it's the end of higher education. It just means that higher education needs to listen more. They've got to innovate more. They've got to stop working within this rigid model. And they've got to unbundle the 120-credit degree there as well as the master's degree. They've got to make things in a more stackable format. They've got to create alternative credentials. They've also got to take somebody's non-credit experiences and turn them into credit because, if you think about what education really is, it's really about earning these competencies that make you an expert in something that allows you to work in the workforce.

Jim Fong (06:35):

But what defines what that expertise is? In the past colleges and universities have used the credit. You need 120 credits. You need three credits in a course. But it's really about did you have that knowledge and being able to quantify and recognize that knowledge. The comprehensive learner record and digital credentials are making that more of a possibility, but if I've got 20 years of leadership experience in working with business, or somebody who's been a lieutenant in the armed forces, he or she needs to be recognized for those things they've learned or they've acquired, and that needs to be part of this competency later on. So I think what Google and IBM and others are doing is they're really challenging that model to say that we want high performing employees, and regardless of whether or not it's a piece of paper or whether or not they've acquired this degree, this competency, let's measure it.

Jim Fong (07:30):

And if we can get it from higher education, that's great, but we're going to develop it ourselves, especially if we can't get what we need in our way. And so I think a lot of these institutions have developed their own things, but I think they look for higher education to be a major player into it. We've actually got a major study that's going to be released shortly. We just surveyed a thousand employers, and employers look at higher education in a very, very positive way. They just need to be listened to, and they need to be part of the process. So I think that's where higher education has a chance to become more and more relevant in the future and that, despite the size of Google and Amazon and others, there is a place for them. And there could be a very, very relevant place for them and a strong place for them, as opposed to a smaller role here. It's really up to higher education to make a choice to reinvent itself basically.

Celisa Steele (08:25):

We're grateful to BenchPrep for sponsoring the Leading Learning Podcast. BenchPrep is an award-winning learning platform purpose-built to help learners feel confident and prepared to take difficult entrance, certification, and licensing tests by delivering an intuitive, efficient, and engaging study experience. BenchPrep helps you accelerate test prep revenue growth by offering the tools you need to create market-ready products and data to improve your content and understand learner behavior. Many of the world's leading associations, credentialing bodies, test providers, and training companies trust BenchPrep to power their online study programs, including ACT, the Association of American Medical Colleges, CFA Institute, CompTIA, GMAC, McGraw-Hill Education, AccessLex, and more. More than 8 million learners have used BenchPrep to attain academic and professional success. To discover more, visit leadinglearning.com/benchprep. Now, back to Jim and Jeff.

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Jeff Cobb (09:34):

You're always involved in studies. It seems to me you're always releasing things. And I know you've released quite a few lately. One that jumped out at me that was particularly interesting—and I think listeners will be really interested in—is one you did with Salesforce. It's kind of a long title. I'm going to read the full title of it because I think it's an informative title. It's called "Supporting & Retaining the New Professional Learner: How Continuing Education Leaders Can Meet the Needs & Expectations of Today's Learners." And I think you've already been alluding to a lot of this, and we'll be sure to link to this particular study in the show notes, but can you give listeners some of the highlights of key findings from that study?

Jim Fong (10:12):

Yeah. That Salesforce study was very interesting, and we've done a number of studies over the last 18 months because we took a perspective of our members are going to need a lot of information to migrate the turbulence that they're feeling right now as a result of the pandemic and demographics and other things like that. You know, we've done studies with StraighterLine on the adult learner that's disconnecting with higher education. The Salesforce one really looks at you're getting possible leads in, and you want them to be students, but what is your strategy to get them to become a student? And let's look at the customer experience a little bit more. We've also done some work with InsideTrack and others on a similar issue here, but the Salesforce study looks at the balance of, you know, can we use predictive analytics?

Jim Fong (11:00):

Can we use better information about who the student could be or who the inquirer is? When do we interface with human beings? And when do we interface with automation, and what does the data tell us in terms of who's coming through the process and who's going to be successful in the process? We surveyed a large group of potential learners on this, and we found out what's important to them and how do they want to be engaged. And we identified six segments, or six personas, that will respond very, very differently. And a lot of the other research we've actually taken those six personas, and we've measured them on a marketing perspective. We've measured those that drop out, how the personas differ there. But the Salesforce one really helps you to look at is your institution ready for this very complicated new adult learner. This new adult learner just doesn't come in, request for information, and sits there and waits for the institution to get back to them.

Jim Fong (11:55):

This adult learner wants acknowledgement of their inquiry. Then they want to be able to get information very easily. Then they want maybe a person to eventually talk to them, but they don't necessarily want to talk to a person right away. And so the strategy of technology, process, and people really plays into that. What we were looking at with the Salesforce study is does the institution have a strategy to engage this future learner better strategically and more relevant basis here because the student of the future is very, very complicated. And so I think that's where the study really focused in. How do you better connect with them? How do you better convert with them, and how do you retain them? And automation plays a role, processes play a role, and human beings play a role—but not to the point where human beings dominate the process because that's a very potentially inefficient process. There's also pros and cons to doing something like that. So that's where that study really focused in on is those differences, on the future adult learner.

Jeff Cobb (12:58):

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And, again, we will link to that study, and I hope, as listeners are hearing you talk about this, that if you don't happen to be from an academic institution, if you're from a trade and professional association or commercial training firm, everything you're talking about there, Jim, still applies because we all have to serve this new adult learner who is just a different type of person than our traditional adult lifelong learner has been. So really being tuned into that. You are always doing a lot of research. I know you've had a number of studies come out recently. Are there other recent research efforts that you'd like to highlight and any fascinating finding from those that it would be good to share?

Jim Fong (13:36):

Well, the one I just mentioned here around the employer, that's something that we're doing with InsideTrack, an association out of GW (George Washington) called NCRN, and Strada Education. Those latter two organizations helped fund this research, but InsideTrack has been really focused in on retention of the student here and how its staff and the students are disconnecting with each other, or they have different perceptions about need. And so that's one study, and then they've worked on that with UPCEA, but UPCEA launched a study of employers as well to see what employers need in terms of education and training in the future. And we're going to release that data next month, some of that data next month at our annual conference. So that's an interesting perspective to hear because we have the adult learner who's very, very complicated. We have the institution who's going through a lot of legacy processes and changes and whatsoever. Now the employer's voice plays into it.

Jim Fong (14:30):

That's actually kind of a big study for us because we really haven't heard from the employer enough. And that why we kind of drove to us. The other study I really wanted to point to is the one we did with StraighterLine. What we saw here is, right before we launched this study, we saw that the National Student Clearinghouse had issued a report that showed declining enrollments. And this is during the pandemic, and, of these declining enrollments, for every three declining enrollments, two were men. One was a woman. And so men were leaving higher education at a fast pace than women are. And so we went and explored that deeper. So we had these six segments, or these six personas, that showed that basically young millennial, middle-aged millennials were leaving at a faster rate than—millennial men actually were leaving at a faster rate than millennial women.

Jim Fong (15:18):

And so what we actually identified is that they were going into vocational jobs. They were looking at short-term money. Basically, they saw jobs as HVAC technicians or electrician's apprentice. And they also saw the retail thing that was happening, where they could actually jump into a job, get $17 an hour plus a bonus. And so they were disconnecting from higher education at a faster rate. So the StraighterLine study really looked at six segments of adult learner, male, female, and identified how they differed, what their beliefs were, why were they disengaging with higher education? And with the hope that they're going reconnect with higher education later on. So all these motivations and behaviors I found were very fascinating. And I think it's going to redefine a lot of what higher education is experiencing because what's going to happen here is you've got a 22-year-old or a 21-year-old young male that leaves higher education, goes into a job,

Jim Fong (16:14):

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and then five years later wants to plug back in, but he's carrying 15 credits, and he wonders whether or not this is going to carry value. He's also been working in a field here where maybe he can get three credits for it or six credits for it. And he also might have a certification that might be worth something. And so these are all things that higher education needs to be ready for and ready to either accept or at least assess in terms of whether it has value toward a degree because a lot of these folks are going to come back potentially, but higher education needs to create stepping stones along the way, on-ramps and off-ramps to education where it's easy for them to come back in because a lot of what we're finding out here is that the perception of higher education from some of these segments toward education is decreased.

Jim Fong (17:02):

On the other hand, when we studied millennial women, they saw higher education as a long-term value. They saw it as a way to gain salary equity as well as job security. So they were staying in higher education at a higher rate than men. So all of these things are pretty fascinating in terms of a lot of the research that we're finding that we're trying to help our members market to and reach these segments better but also help them to challenge themselves to redesigning their curriculum, to have certificates, to have badges, to have other programs along the way that'll be stackable toward a degree.

Jeff Cobb (17:43):

Back in January, you published your take on professional, continuing online education in 2022, and we'll link to that as well as the various studies that you've highlighted. But one of the trends I wanted to ask about here is what you identified as your number five, which is the Great Resignation. And we hear just an awful lot about the Great Resignation these days. It's one of those things prompted to some extent by COVID, prompted by other factors as well. But how do you see the Great Resignation impacting continuing education and professional development going forward?

Jim Fong (18:20):

Well, the Great Resignation is a warning sign for a lot of things right now. The way I look at it, it's kind of a power shift that's happening with employers and workers right now for a number of factors. It's a lot of different things. It isn't just one thing. We have 11 million jobs, and 6 million are being filled, and people are leaving 4 million jobs. So for every two jobs you fill, you have one and a half people that leave or whatever. It's kind of a crazy thing that's happening. However, unemployment is low. And so all of these things are signaling to me that actually employees have more choice. And, as a result, employers are being put in difficult situations here where they they've got to pay people more. They've got to give people benefits that they didn't normally give them and whatsoever.

Jim Fong (19:05):

It's a power shift that's happening toward the workforce. However, business and industry will want to wrestle some of that power back. And we're seeing that happening. We saw it happen multiple times in our history. We saw automation happen. We saw mass production happen. Now we're actually seeing automation happening. We saw it within the Winter Olympics, and we saw robots that were going out in the facilities and if they saw somebody without a mask on or a face-covering on, whatever you want to call it, the robot would approach them and tell them to put one on. We also saw the food kitchens at the Olympics make food for people based on their phones. It would actually make the food and actually deliver it on conveyor belts. And it really eliminated a lot of people in this.

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Jim Fong (19:51):

And that's kind of scary. So employers, in order to get that workforce back, they will automate more things, and that's going to change our economy. And we have a problem with supply chain and logistics. We have trucks that deliver food and supplies to us. We have autonomous vehicles that can do that. All that stuff is being accelerated more and more as a result of pulling power back. And so I've said this long thing about our economy, but it's going to change the way the worker of the future. It's going to change the fact that the workforce skills are going to be different moving forward. Yes, a lot of science and technology and all those degrees will probably be the same here, or we'll need more science workers, but, in an automated economy, we will need people that can look at fixing electronics better or to recalibrating software or coding and whatever.

Jim Fong (20:45):

All of this automation of the future will redefine our workforce as employers pull more power back, and we'll need more employees in different sections of it. And so it will actually put different constraints or different expectations onto higher education in the future. I think that's where institutions need to look farther in advance besides just coding boot camps or cybersecurity. They nearly need to anticipate what this workforce of the future is going to be. And it doesn't mean that liberal arts and humanities degrees are going to disappear. There's probably more of a role for them in a future workplace, but that just-in-time learning, until we figure that out around alternative credentials and certificates and badges, is a good bridge education toward whatever our economy looks like in the future, or it could be a major staple for higher education that runs parallel to that degree. And so these are all things where the Great Resignation is very relevant, but it also is a signal for us to be looking more toward the future around what will higher education look like, and how do we actually align ourselves better? How do we produce better content? How do we break down existing content? How do we anticipate future needs? How do we develop that new program that's around automation or electronics or logistics or whatsoever? There's a lot of things to unpack, but it's all kind of tied together.

Jeff Cobb (22:11):

So, given the way that workforce needs are changing and just the nature of work is changing, to what extent are you seeing continuing education providers and employers really collaborate effectively to address that need for ongoing lifelong learning? And if there any examples you can offer, that would be great.

Jim Fong (22:33):

Well, I see a lot more university colleges and universities partnering more with business and industry, really giving them a stronger presence at the table. In the past, the higher education model was faculty-defined expertise and competencies and what it takes here. I think, for higher education to become more relevant in the future, they need to engage the employer more. They need to engage business and industry more. They're doing that more and more. I mean, within our membership, just in the last month alone, I've seen in some of our blogs, our internal blog, discussion boards, interests around, "Okay, who's doing this with corporate training? Who's doing that?" The conversation within our own community has really ramped up around who's working with alumni, who's working with business and industry more. Do you have positions that are set up to engage the corporate and employee community more? So we're seeing that more internally.

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Jim Fong (23:31):

But, if I look bigger picture here, business and industry need to be more part of the curriculum. It can't be just faculty defining the curriculum and say what the whole occupational pathway is to becoming an accountant or a finance person. Business and industry needs to be more a part of that, and institutions are engaging them more. It isn't just you're sitting on my board so we can get a donation for you later, or you're a very well-placed alumni, you sit on this board. They're actually working more and more together in terms of true advisory boards, not advisory boards that look at an other perspectives here, but I think that's where we're seeing more and more activity. If you pull up a lot of the news and a lot of the PR, there are more and more press releases about Institution X working with Amazon, Institution Y working with Google, Institution C working with the business and industry, the local chamber of commerce or whatsoever. All of these things are happening at a greater pace. It's not fully data-driven at this point, but we're seeing more and more in that within our own community. And also within the media.

Jeff Cobb (24:41):

Higher education, academia broadly, is obviously a very big provider of continuing and professional education. Another huge and, I think, often underappreciated provider of continuing education and professional development is the association sector, trade and professional associations who deliver a tremendous amount of continuing education, professional development annually. In fact, UPCEA itself delivers quite a bit of continuing education and professional development. Are you seeing any instances of academic continuing education providers and trade and professional associations collaborating effectively to meet the needs for lifelong learning that are out there?

Jim Fong (25:25):

Yes, Jeff, and there's a number of efforts within our association, some of them around healthcare, some around business and business management. But the one that comes to mind the closest here is there's a number of our members, within our association, that have been involved with engineering, especially with the International Association of Continuing Engineering Education, where a number of our members have been working with this association to help provide a lot of non-credit or even credit opportunities for engineers. And they've come together more as a collaboration, a collaborative group of institutions to help define what engineering needs are in the future because engineers are faced with a lot of different challenges, ranging from, yes, they're very good in their field, in their field of expertise, but they've been asked to do so much more.

Jim Fong (26:19):

A lot of it comes out to management of staff, business types of things around finances and marketing. So I know that the whole engineering profession has been rethought of in terms of what other skills do they need. And so I know folks like Nelson Baker at Georgia Tech and others have been taking a more active role in terms of engineering education beyond its traditional degree perspective there. And related to that here, there's been a lot of other efforts within our UPCEA community to really ramp up the whole coding and cybersecurity, and boot camps have been happening right and left as a result of high demands for certain professionals in these areas. So there's been a lot of corporate providers that have approached UPCEA institutions, and we come together and have said our institutions within our membership are very interested in, and I think there's been a lot of growth within some of those fields like

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cybersecurity and coding boot camps and whatsoever within our membership, and that's been happening. Our association has responded in a lot of different ways.

Jim Fong (27:24):

There was an education, a teacher gap 10 years ago, where a lot of our institutions came together with the support of certain either statewide or national associations to fill that teacher gap. Now, we're also starting to look at healthcare as well. Nurses have been through a lot lately, and do we anticipate that there's going be demand for more nurses in the future? Yes. And so those discussions are starting to happen within our membership. To go to the next step here is to engage the association that heads up a lot of the nursing education, nursing activities there. Might be a good thing if our members aren't already doing that. A lot of it has to be let's actually drill down a little further and find out what's being done here.

Jeff Cobb (28:08):

Well, it does seem too, when you look at an emerging trend—say, something like cybersecurity, which you you've mentioned—often when you have a trend like that emerging, the need for something like a boot camp or a new certificate program emerges with it because you have to get people skilled into being able to do what's needed to ride that trend, basically. And it just seems like in instances within the academic world, you've often got access to the faculty who are research-based, who are doing the cutting-edge work on digging into a particular topic or trend in depth. On the trade and professional association side, you often have the frontline practitioners. Those are often the volunteers that are delivering education at conferences and things like that. And it seems like being able to merge those two, marry those two in the service of creating things like boot camps and certificates, could be very powerful if both sides are thinking about that opportunity.

Jim Fong (29:04):

Yeah. If they're working more in tandem, I think that's a very, very powerful way to go. And that's where I think, on the engineering and some of the technology side, having greater coordination makes more sense here because a lot of the associations are creating certifications, what it takes to be certified as a professional within that field here. Education is creating a degree kind of thing over here and getting involved with training now. Now, a lot of that training needs to plug into some of this certification or fill a gap in between certification. A lot of it comes down to, okay, yes, I'm going to be ISSMP certified within cybersecurity or whatever, and I know to do this, but do I really know how to manage my staff at all? What's the role of education there? Or can they, can the association plug back into the member regarding, okay, now that you've got all these certifications, now maybe you can get nine credits off your master's degree in cybersecurity, or maybe you can do this instead? All these things are possibilities where, if the trade associations and the professional associations are working more in tandem, these things fit better, and I'm back to that Lego piece there. They start stacking within each other, and it makes more sense. Why develop things in silos where you're learning the same content in a lot of cases?

Jeff Cobb (30:25):

Obviously so much has evolved in the world of learning generally, adult learning, learning technology. A lot has changed over the course of the last decade or so. And then so much has been accelerated by COVID and just the need for education to transform, to move online, to be thought about a bit differently. What are some of the trends that have you most excited right now?

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Jim Fong (30:52):

Well, I'm excited for automation. Maybe that's the sci-fi or the geek in me, but I'm also terrified by it as well. I think there's, there's a lot of opportunities with obviously drones and autonomous vehicles and other things like that. I hope we get to the point where higher education is more integrated into not just the degree parts of it, but also the non-degree parts of it as well. How do we actually innovate around autonomous vehicles? How do we actually support autonomous vehicles? How do we actually design an industry around this? The same thing could be said around plant-based foods. We've got a lot of new industries that are evolving, which are very exciting, but there's a whole science side of it. There's a whole degree side of it, but there's also a whole non-degree side of it as well.

Jim Fong (31:44):

There's also opportunities where folks are working within an industry, and they can actually jump into the industry or jump out of the industry. It needs to be more customized education. And it's a transformation of education that gets me excited. I want all 400 of our member institutions to succeed. I want them to look at their portfolios. I want them to break down legacies in terms of access. I want them to provide more access. I think that there is a lot of folks out there that could benefit from education better. We just don't provide enough access for it. I think there's opportunities for us to—online makes it more accessible. However, we need to make it more price-accessible as well. We also need to make it more valuable going into the future. When I jumped into this whole alternative credentialing thing, and it's been around for a while—I really got focused in on it about five or six years ago.

Jim Fong (32:35):

I just said, okay, really, the online thing is taking off. This alternative credential thing is just something I have to do, I should do. But now I really believe in it. I really believe that it's going to transform higher education. It's going to be such an important part of our new economy. We really need to look at how do we actually move from a legacy-driven, 120-credit model here to something that's more prepared for the future or more unbundled for the future or more accessible. And I think that these are some things that I get really excited about, but I also feel like I don't want to see any of our members fail because they were too rigid in terms of the degree. I want them to see what the future is. I don't necessarily know if I really know what the future is, but there's a lot of indicators that suggest that the opportunity for institutions will be to provide access, will be to provide more value, to make sure that their curriculum meets the needs of employers.

Jim Fong (33:34):

Employers need to play a role. They need to help define what makes for a successful engineer, an accountant, a frontline person, a manager. Higher education can no longer do that independently. And yes, they leveraged business and industry in the past but not to the degree and the magnitude that they need to in the future. It needs to be more overlapped and intertwined. Business and industry needs to help define this better because that future five years from now is going to be very, very, very different from what it is today.

Jeff Cobb (34:06):

Looking to the future, you are somebody who is a thought leader. You're a consultant. Organizations, institutions look to you for guidance. What's the one piece of advice or one message you would really want continuing education providers to get right now, to take to

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heart, to ensure that they are going to be successful in the coming years and really be effective providers of continuing education and professional development?

Jim Fong (34:37):

Well, I've probably been already saying this here, but it's not to be wed to that 120-credit model here or that 36-credit graduate model here. The same outcome can happen. You can get that bachelor's degree in business by doing a number of certificates along the way, getting an associate's degree along the way, taking what you've learned as being an HVAC installer or whatsoever, in terms of training courses that you might have had. And then maybe you took a MOOC later on from the University of California at Davis in terms of presentation skills. Being able to take that stuff in and say, okay, I'm 30% ready toward this 120-credit degree, but let's not be bound by that parameter here. My learning should get me to the same place of competency here. I don't want institutions to be totally wed—I want them to provide education and access in a very stackable, interchangeable way.

Jim Fong (35:33):

It's like a Lego thing here where all the pieces fit together, and then you get something beautiful at the end, but everything that you're creating along the way has relevancy, has beauty in it and whatever. The currency of education has been a credit, but a credit, as a denomination or a currency, doesn't really say a whole heck of a lot. Can I critically think? Can I public speak? Can I do high-level mathematics or not? I think these competencies need to be carried forward and be assessed and be added on to this digital resume or credential that they have and then be applied to future learning online. We need to provide more of that type of flexibility in terms of higher education. This very rigid 120-credit model thing is not as fast, is not as adaptable for what I see as a future economy that's going to be fast moving.

Celisa Steele (36:32):

Jim Fong is chief research officer at the University Professional and Continuing Education Association. You can learn more about UPDEA at upcea.edu. That's U-P-C-E-A dot E-D-U. And you can connect with Jim on LinkedIn.

Jeff Cobb (36:49):

At leadinglearning.com/episode298, you'll find links to the UPCEA site, Jim's profile on LinkedIn, and Jim's blog Benchmark This!, along with full show notes, a transcript, other resources, and options for subscribing to the podcast. To make sure you don't miss future episodes and to help us get some data on the impact of the podcast, we'd love for you to subscribe if you haven't already,

Celisa Steele (37:13):

We'd be grateful if you take a minute to rate us on Apple Podcasts. Jeff and I personally appreciate the feedback, and reviews and ratings help us show up when people search for content on leading a learning business. Go to leading learning.com/apple to leave a review.

Jeff Cobb (37:30):

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Celisa Steele (37:40):

Thanks again, and see you next time on the Leading Learning Podcast.

[music for this episode by DanoSongs, www.danosongs.com]

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