

# FROM CONCEPT TO CLASSROOM: DEVELOPING DIGITAL WORKFORCE READINESS BADGES



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## Abstract

The evolving demands of the agricultural workforce require skills beyond traditional technical expertise, including communication, teamwork, adaptability, and self-management. These employability skills are critical for fostering innovation and addressing the complexities of modern agriculture. In support of helping community college faculty to address these needs, the Agriculture Workforce Training for Collaborative Leadership (AWT4CL) project developed digital badges for workforce readiness. The project emphasizes the importance of prior knowledge activation and engaging tools to support skill development, drawing from frameworks like collaborative leadership, experiential learning, and gamification. As part of the formative evaluation process, community college faculty members described their experiences and observations of their students. Early discussions with stakeholders noted a need to help students understand the link between classroom content, co-curricular experiences, and employability skills. The AWT4CL team created digital badges focused on specific employability skills to help students recognize, develop, and demonstrate critical workforce competencies. This paper documents the development process, including

stakeholder engagement and formative program evaluation methods that informed the iterative design of the badges.

*Keywords:* workforce skills, community colleges, agriculture, leadership, learning badges

The evolving demands of America's agricultural workforce highlight the need for skills and competencies beyond traditional technical expertise (Colclasure, 2020; Donaldson et al., 2023). Employers increasingly value employability skills that align with collaborative leadership and critical growth areas, such as effective communication, teamwork, adaptability, and self-management (Kaki et al., 2022; Watson et al., 2019). These skills are crucial for addressing modern agriculture's complex and dynamic challenges, fostering innovation and resilience in an industry continuously adapting to new opportunities and uncertainties. Developing these competencies is essential for preparing the agricultural workforce to meet the demands of a rapidly changing sector (Crawford & Fink, 2020; Parrella et al., 2024).

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Building on this foundation, collaborative leadership has emerged as a vital strategy for agriculture education (Biderman et al, 2023; National Research Council, 2009). As a process-oriented approach, collaborative leadership emphasizes leveraging the strengths and contributions of all team members to enhance decision-making and problem-solving (Center for Community Health and Development, n.d.; Lawrence, 2017; Raelin, 2006). Unlike traditional models of centralized authority, it fosters shared responsibility and equal participation, enabling innovation and inclusivity in managing initiatives (Lawrence, 2017). The alignment of collaborative leadership with frameworks like transformational leadership and experiential learning further underscores its importance in cultivating mutual respect and adaptability in diverse agricultural contexts (Crawford & Fink, 2020; Lawrence, 2017).

The importance of collaborative leadership is further supported by findings from research initiatives like Google's Project Oxygen and Project Aristotle, which demonstrate that skills such as effective communication, dependability, and teamwork are critical to organizational success (Duhigg, 2016; Kolar, 2019). Studies by Parrella et al. (2024) and Velten et al. (2021) reinforce these findings, emphasizing the value of communication, decision-making, and self-management in achieving sustainable agriculture. Research with employers clearly recognizes non-technical workforce skills as critical career readiness and workforce development components (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2024).

Existing research has highlighted the critical need to develop non-technical workforce skills that are better aligned with the future of work (America Succeeds, 2021; CABI, 2024). Correspondingly, in 2020, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) released a report on workforce development skills and attributes for natural resources and agricultural workers (Crawford & Fink, 2020). Critical employability skills identified by APLU included communication, problem solving, and working with others (Figure 1).

Drawing from colleges of agriculture and natural resources, Crawford and Fink (2019, 2020) identified eleven employability skills that were most important to stakeholders and had the largest gaps between education preparedness and career readiness. These eleven skills include: (1) Understand Role in the Workplace and Have Realistic Career Expectations, (2) Recognize and Deal

Constructively with Conflict, (3) Accept and Apply Critique and Direction in the Workplace, (4) Listen Effectively, (5) Communicate Accurately and Concisely, (6) Realize the Effect of Decisions, (7) Build Professional Relationships, (8) Navigate Change and Ambiguity, (9) Identify and Analyze Problems, (10) Transfer Knowledge from One Situation to Another, and (11) Ask Good questions. Based on the eleven key employability skills identified by Crawford and Fink, the project has adapted and extended existing leadership training materials for use in community colleges and technical schools. These efforts include developing reusable learning tools, such as skill badges, that promote workforce alignment and leadership development among post-secondary agricultural educators. This paper documents the project's efforts, focusing on creating these learning badges and the methods used for ongoing program evaluation, incorporating valuable insights from stakeholders and team members.

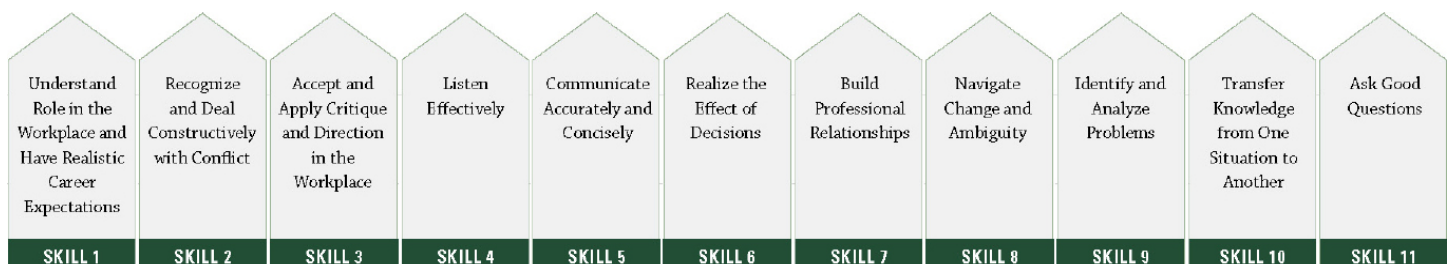
The AWT4CL project relies on conceptual frameworks to guide these efforts, such as activating prior knowledge and gamification through badges. These frameworks provide a structure for enhancing educational design and creating engaging, practical tools that empower learners to develop and demonstrate critical skills in alignment with workforce needs. Through this approach, the AWT4CL project contributes to bridging the gap between education and career readiness in agricultural leadership development.

### Activating Prior Knowledge

Activating prior knowledge is fundamental in educational theory and practice, providing a foundation for effective learning. Research in educational psychology highlights how schema or mental model development influences students' ability to learn, remember, and apply new information (Dirksen, 2012; Fink, 2013; Jung et al., 2022). Building on these principles, practitioners like Dr. Joye Norris (2003) emphasize the importance of beginning with what learners already know. Norris explains that activating prior learning validates learners' experiences and empowers them to build confidence, as they recognize their knowledge as a valuable starting point. This approach shifts the dynamic from teacher-centered instruction to collaborative learning, fostering deeper engagement and a sense of student ownership.

Figure 1

*Critical Employability Skills Identified by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities*



Note. From *Academia to the Workforce: Critical Growth Areas for Students Today*, by P. Crawford and W. Fink, 2020 (<https://www.aplu.org/library/from-academia-to-the-workforce-critical-growth-areas-for-students-today>).

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Complementing these ideas, author and instructional design expert Julie Dirkson (2012) highlights the connection between prior knowledge and student confidence and competence. By helping students construct schemas based on past experiences, educators make new information more relevant, engaging, and applicable. When students are encouraged to reflect on and share prior experiences, they are more likely to acknowledge their experiences as relevant. Inviting learners to socialize their reflections in playful and meaningful ways not only primes them for new ideas but also enhances their ability to build on existing knowledge, enriching their learning process.

### Gamification Badges

Research on gamified e-learning systems highlights the motivational benefits of incorporating elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, levels, and feedback (Khaldi et al., 2023). Badging has emerged as a particularly effective tool, offering visual and cognitive appeal. By showcasing accomplishments and encouraging progression to higher levels, badges help motivate learners while recognizing their verification of experiences (Carey & Stefaniak, 2018; Stefaniak & Carey, 2019; Stork et al., 2022). Digital badges further enhance this dynamic by serving as tangible representations of achievements, readily displayed on online platforms, fostering both recognition and enjoyment. Additionally, they can bridge the gap between formal education and informal learning by linking classroom content with learners' other experiences. As summarized in Figure 2, the benefits of digital badges extend beyond motivation to fostering a sense of accomplishment and connection.

Badging in higher education has grown in response to its ability to motivate learners and recognize their achievements in meaningful ways (Khaldi et al., 2023). However, implementing badging systems across courses requires a deliberate and formalized approach. This includes documenting each badge's purpose, transferability, and learning objectives to ensure alignment with educational goals and real-world applications (Stoddard et al., 2023). Formally recognized badges can be displayed on professional platforms such as social media profiles, personal websites, or online portfolios. This not only adds an element of fun and recognition to the learning process but also helps learners connect classroom content with nontraditional learning experiences, creating a bridge between academic and practical skill development (Manzano-León et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2023; Zeybek & Saygi, 2023).

Building on these educational theories and insights, the AWT4CL project introduced a tailored approach to badging. These badges were crafted to encourage self-reflection, highlight transferable skills, and bridge classroom learning with real-world employability. By reframing outside-the-classroom activities as valuable experiences connected to coursework, the badges aim to help students identify and articulate skills they have gained that strengthen resumes and employability and recognize the relevance to course content. This approach fosters dialogue and self-awareness and positions learners to understand that experiences and classroom learning can develop employability skills.

This paper documents why and how digital badging emerged in this project to help agriculture students acknowledge valuable workforce readiness experiences in and out of the classroom. It also documents how formative evaluation engaged the project faculty cohort. Faculty insights and reflections contributed to the collaborative development of digital badging as a learning object that

Figure 2

*Summary of the Benefits of Digital Badges*

#### Ways that digital badges can bridge the gap between formal and informal education:

- **Recognize Diverse Learning:** Digital badges allow individuals to showcase various skills and knowledge acquired from multiple sources, including traditional schools, online courses, workshops, hackathons, volunteer work, and more. Recognition is not limited to formal degrees but encompasses the totality of an individual's learning journey.
- **Validate Informal Learning:** Informal learning often occurs outside traditional educational institutions, making it difficult to document and validate. Digital badges provide a way to authenticate and validate these experiences, making them more credible to employers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders.
- **Represent Specific Skills:** Badges can represent specific skills, competencies, or achievements, breaking down complex learning experiences into manageable, verifiable components. This granularity helps employers and educators better understand the strengths and expertise of individuals.
- **Engage and Motivate:** The gamification aspect of earning badges can motivate learners to participate in formal and informal learning experiences. The accomplishment associated with earning a badge can drive individuals to seek new knowledge and skills continuously.
- **Record Lifelong Learning Activities:** Digital badges create a lifelong learning record that showcases an individual's continuous growth and development. This record paints a more holistic picture of a person's capabilities beyond traditional credentials.
- **Respond to an Evolving Skills Landscape:** New skills become valuable as the job market evolves. Digital badges enable quick adaptation to emerging skills and competencies, ensuring learners stay relevant in rapidly changing industries.

*Note.* Summarized from: "Gamification of e-learning in higher education: A systematic literature review," by A. Khaldi, R. Bouzidi, and F. Nader, 2023, *Smart Learning Environments*, 10(1), Article 10. (<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-023-00227-z>).

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could be used across agriculture classes to help students bridge learning opportunities and better understand how academic content and co-curricular experiences can be made relevant to work experiences.

### Methods

A formative evaluation framework was employed to ensure continuous feedback loops, allowing for adaptive modifications and enhanced effectiveness of the AWT4CL project. This approach facilitated alignment with participants' needs and responses, supporting the achievement of project objectives (Goldfarb & Morrison, 2014; Trochim et al., 2012) and building a collaborative leadership approach. Multiple iterative data collection methods, including focus groups (George, 2023b), semi-structured interviews, and artifacts (Edvancers, 2022; Oshima et al., 2020) provided robust qualitative data that informed the inductive refinement of project activities and outcomes. Insights from these qualitative methods were regularly shared with the AWT4CL leadership team to ensure that interventions remained participant-centered and aligned with teaching and learning needs (Bhavsar et al., 2007). This iterative process strengthened the project's relevance and supported the collaborative development and refinement of initiatives, such as the digital badging system. Feedback from actual badge users has been pivotal in tailoring badge criteria and implementation processes to effectively meet educational goals and cohort needs (Noyes et al., 2020). This project and associated protocols were approved through the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech.

In the project's first year, two 90-minute focus groups were conducted to confirm the relevance of workforce skills identified in the APLU report. These sessions included a diverse group of stakeholders ( $n=13$ ), such as employers, faculty, current students, and alumni of agriculture workforce training programs within the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). Discussions were transcribed, thematically coded, and summarized in a one-page document shared with relevant communities. This dissemination sparked further interest in professional learning and curriculum enhancements, particularly among VCCS faculty.

Building on these findings, the project's second year focused on recruiting fourteen community college faculty to participate in a cohort to advance teaching strategies for agriculture students. As an initial activity, cohort members participated in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with an external evaluator via Zoom. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' interests, experiences, and perceptions at the project's onset, ensuring that the cohort's priorities and the educational needs of their students were clearly understood (George, 2023a; Jamshed, 2014). These interviews explored intentional approaches to building durable skills, such as communication and leadership, and were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for emerging themes (see Table 1 for interview questions).

During the third year, cohort members were encouraged to document their experiences by writing blog posts for the project website. These public posts highlighted their learning, skill development, and adapted teaching practices, serving as a resource for external stakeholders and other VCCS faculty members. The blog posts offered a platform for sharing emerging topics, documenting impacts, and articulating cohort members' evolving needs and interests.

In the fourth year, focus groups were revisited to gather insights from the community college cohort members. An external evaluator facilitated a one-hour Zoom session with five of the remaining seven cohort participants. These discussions explored faculty relationships and teaching approaches and observed classroom behaviors that reflected workforce readiness skills. The collegial familiarity among participants fostered generative dialogue, with all members contributing actively. This iterative focus group process further reinforced the project's commitment to professional development and continuous improvement, ensuring alignment with cohort and institutional goals.

Table 1

*AWT4CL Cohort Member Interview Protocol Questions*

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#### Questions

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1. Can you discuss your current curriculum and how you use it to build soft skills, such as communication and leadership, among your students?
  2. You may have seen the APLU report and the summary from the focus groups held in Virginia in the fall. There are indications of a need to build problem-solving, verbal communication, and leadership skills among our Ag students. Can you talk about ways you may see these needs expressed in your students?
  3. Based on your experiences and observations, do you have any suggestions for course content adaptations? Are there activities that could build or shape skills if applied intentionally?
  4. What do you hope to gain from participating in the "Agriculture Workforce Training for Collaborative Leadership" program? What are your expectations?
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*Note.* The first AWT4CL cohort member interviews used interview protocol questions. Responses to the questions identified a need to help students bridge extracurricular activities with academics and workforce skills.

**Results**

The initial focus group revealed strong agreement with the APLU employability skills report, reflecting a shared recognition of its relevance. This discussion highlighted interest in cultivating problem-solving and communication skills, as well as helping students reflect on experiences, accept their mistakes, and grow from them. One participant summarized the group’s perspective: “We are starting from scratch with many of these students. They are interested and want to work in agriculture but do not always know how to interact with an employer or with each other.”

Once community college faculty cohort members were identified, semi-structured interviews emphasized the importance of personal experiences in making academic work relevant. Faculty identified co-curricular activities, current and past jobs, early learning experiences like 4-H and FFA, and internships as significant predictors of career interests. These experiences shaped what the faculty chose to study as students and influenced how they applied academic concepts. The interviews also highlighted practical challenges. For example, many community college students and faculty juggle competing

priorities, often balancing part-time commitments with academic responsibilities. These realities complicate efforts for students to participate in or faculty to offer co-curricular experiences. Table 2 summarizes emerging themes from these interviews, which encouraged the project leadership team to explore strategies for helping students connect past experiences with their academic and future career goals.

In response, the resulting cohort professional development initiatives have focused on practical strategies to enhance durable skill development. Key activities include lesson planning to recognize and develop verbal communication skills, rubric design for assessing workforce skills, and project design using the Plan-Do-Study-Act technique (Knudsen et al., 2019; Leis & Shojania, 2017; Taylor et al., 2014) to improve faculty assessment of workforce-related outcomes. Faculty were also encouraged to engage in peer-to-peer reflection through a blog, fostering collaboration and the exchange of lessons learned. This emphasis on reflection and meaningful experiences inspired training for cohort members, focusing on co-curricular activities that help students identify and pursue meaningful agricultural career paths.

**Table 2**

*Emergent Themes from Faculty Interviews*

<b>Category/Theme with Related/Supporting Phrases</b>
Observation about students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of problem-solving skills</li> <li>• desire for experience to be spoon-fed</li> <li>• going "silent" instead of asking for help</li> <li>• lack of self-confidence</li> <li>• anxiety</li> <li>• not connecting with others</li> <li>• not on time, not appropriately dressed for the task, assignments not on time, poor communication skills (for coursework-related items)</li> <li>• lack of experiences that might help shape leadership, work ethic, and problem-solving skills</li> </ul>
Experiences that enrich durable skill development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• building in scenarios (for dialogue and discussion; peer to peer sharing; informal evaluation)</li> <li>• invite in industry guests</li> <li>• skill-a-thon style stations where students have a chance to teach back to peers in small groups</li> <li>• workshops to help students be prepared for internships or engaged experience</li> <li>• capstone project</li> <li>• group collaborative work</li> <li>• field trips</li> <li>• peer-to-peer sharing</li> <li>• presentations - communication skills</li> <li>• connecting to alumni</li> <li>• labs</li> <li>• integrate problem-solving opportunities</li> </ul>
Out-of-classroom experiences that build durable student skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• internships and co-ops</li> <li>• co-curricular clubs (ag or hort club)</li> <li>• service activities</li> <li>• peer-to-peer learning</li> <li>• hosting events</li> </ul>

*Note.* Summarized from: “Gamification of e-learning in higher education: A systematic literature review,” by A. Khaldi, R. Bouzidi, and F. Nader, 2023, *Smart Learning Environments*, 10(1), Article 10. (<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-023-00227-z>).

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As part of these efforts, the idea of reflecting on skills and knowledge through digital badging emerged. During the 2022 Cohort Connections Meeting, participants envisioned learning badges as reusable learning objects. These badges, designed for use within a learning management system (i.e., Canvas), were developed to align with the APLU's eleven critical growth areas where students often need additional preparation for workforce success. Over the following months, the AWT4CL team developed badge visuals, descriptions, and criteria outlining what learners must demonstrate to earn them. Figure 3 provides examples of these badges and their descriptions.

The blog launched in 2022 has become a valuable resource for program evaluation, providing artifacts that capture the impact of these initiatives. Evaluation surveys and blog entries indicate a shift in faculty lesson planning, focusing on building student engagement. Faculty reported incorporating co-created rubrics, dialogue-based activities to enhance verbal communication and relationship-building skills, and reflective exercises that bridge past experiences with current learning. These practices aim to help students make meaningful connections between academic content and real-world applications.

The blog also serves as a platform for cohort members to share their experiences integrating these strategies. For instance, one cohort member detailed the implementation


of badges in a small group setting in the post, "Integrating Employability Skills in a Traditional Ag Classroom through Learning Badges" (White, 2023). Another member explored gamification as a motivational tool in "Horticultural Jeopardy: Motivation through Gamification" (Casteel, 2022). Reflecting on this strategy, a faculty member coined the term "jobification" to describe the use of "gamification," which he described as a focus on fun, to instead emphasize the value of badges as a way to help students relate classroom content to their lives and careers.

## Discussion

This project began during the onset of the pandemic, which necessitated a transition to remote classes for the community college cohort before eventually returning to in-person instruction. While faculty reflections on student behaviors and growing interest in digital learning and benchmarking as the pandemic may have heightened strategies, these insights align with broader research on engaging and motivating learners and preparing them for workforce readiness.

Figure 3







A sampling of AWT4CL Employability Skill Badges



**AGRICULTURE  
WORKFORCE  
TRAINING**  
FOR COLLABORATIVE  
LEADERSHIP

### AWT4CL Employability Skill Badges

Research by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) highlights gaps between the skills needed for agricultural employment and the proficiency or competency of individuals pursuing that employment. (See <http://www.aplu.org/employability-skills>.) Eleven skills were identified as critical growth areas for students entering the workforce, and those skills clustered into four categories: communication, decision-making, professionalism, and leadership. The AWT4CL project team prepared learning badges for each of the APLU employability skills, identifying a brief description and earning criteria for each. For more information on the AWT4CL project, go to <http://bit.ly/awt4cl>

	Skill	Badge	Description	Earning Criteria
Communication	Communicate Effectively, Accurately and Concisely		Awareness and understanding of effective and clear communication in professional settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active engagement when communicating in person or on virtual platforms.</li> <li>Concise and thoughtful communication in professional and personal settings.</li> <li>Dialogic prowess in conveying purpose and desired outcomes.</li> </ul>
	Listen Effectively		Comprehension of elements of effective listening in professional settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interest in the topic.</li> <li>Absorbs and utilizes information toward task/project completion.</li> <li>Gives feedback to acknowledge receipt and understanding of messages.</li> </ul>
	Ask Good Questions		Curiosity and desire to learn through asking questions to improve understanding and communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultivation of an environment where questions create dialogue to build deeper understanding.</li> <li>Enhancement of interpersonal bonding through inquisitive discussion.</li> <li>Asking questions tactfully to enhance cognitive understanding and knowledge.</li> </ul>
Decision-Making	Identify and Analyze Problems		Collaborative problem-solving through problem analysis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contextual, root cause analysis of problems.</li> <li>Brainstorming possible solutions/approaches to address problems effectively.</li> <li>Informed knowledge of alternative best solutions/approaches.</li> </ul>
	Realize the Effect of Decisions		Symbolizes decision-making, scenario planning, and ability to engage in "what if" queries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appreciation of scenario planning.</li> <li>Capacity for handling multiple perspectives.</li> <li>Recognition of time constraints in the quality of decision-making</li> </ul>
	Transfer Knowledge from One Situation to Another		Potentials for transferring/applying learned knowledge/experiences to different situations through critical reflection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding of knowledge transfer.</li> <li>Ability to identify instances where knowledge and skills can be applied across learning experiences.</li> <li>Ability to communicate with peers the instances and value of knowledge transfer.</li> </ul>

Note. From "Digital Learning Badges," by Virginia Tech (<https://sites.google.com/vt.edu/awt/learning-badges>). In the public domain.

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### Badging to Illuminate Relevance

The AWT4CL Employability Skill Badges were designed to help faculty incorporate badges linked directly to course material. These badges serve as flexible learning tools, allowing faculty to adjust their use as needed to acknowledge and reward students. The badges encourage students to reflect on past experiences to activate prior knowledge, connect them to classroom concepts, and apply their learning to real-world situations. This adaptability enables agriculture faculty to seamlessly integrate badging activities into their curriculum, ensuring that they complement existing coursework rather than complicate it. Badging development has utilized the concepts behind gamification, prior knowledge, and collaborative leadership approaches.

Faculty have recognized the dual benefits of this approach. While the gamified nature of badges adds a sense of playfulness, the more profound reward lies in helping students connect their academic learning to personal growth and career development. One faculty member noted, "We are all trying to help students connect the dots between what they learn in the classroom, their life experience, and a potential career in agriculture." In this way, the initial draw of gamification as a motivator was strengthened as the value of the badging was realized to help students appreciate the value of their life experiences in the context of the workforce.

### The Value of Reflective Practice and Relationships

Badges awarded for student reflections on co-curricular activities, work experiences, or internships have elevated these activities without requiring faculty to organize additional out-of-class initiatives. One faculty member highlighted the practicality of this approach: "I do not really have the capacity to offer a club or out-of-the-classroom activity." By asking students to reflect on their relevant out-of-school experiences, faculty honor the diverse backgrounds of their students. This approach is particularly beneficial for students who balance jobs, family responsibilities, and academic commitments and may not have the time to participate in traditional extracurricular activities.

The reflective practice also fosters stronger connections between students' past experiences and their current academic journey. It acknowledges the unique challenges and opportunities students face, especially those from nontraditional backgrounds, and provides them with a platform to integrate and celebrate their diverse learning pathways.

### Ongoing Development and Future Directions

The badging initiative, envisioned as a reusable learning object applicable across various educational settings, is still in its early stages. The AWT4CL project has developed digital learning badges that can be awarded through Canvas modules. Each badge signifies that a student has demonstrated a connection to a specific workforce skill. A badge matrix has been created to outline each badge's

skill descriptions and earning criteria, ensuring clarity and consistency.

Evaluation surveys are being developed for students and faculty to assess this strategy's impact further. These surveys aim to gauge the effectiveness of badges as reflective practice tools, helping students bridge their experiences and interests in agriculture with their academic learning. Additionally, the surveys will explore how well the badges recognize critical skills needed for leadership in agriculture and food systems.

One area of ongoing exploration involves understanding motivations for participating in non-required badging exercises. By learning more about what drives students to engage with these activities, faculty can refine the strategy to maximize its impact. The badging evaluation process will provide valuable insights for integrating badging into curricula, ensuring that it remains meaningful and practical for students and faculty.

### Summary

While most faculty recognize the importance of skill-based learning, progress with implementation has been gradual (Ali & Khan, 2023; Blake, 2024). Early discussions with AWT4CL cohort members highlighted the need to connect co-curricular experiences with classroom learning to emphasize the value of diverse experiences in building job skills. These discussions encouraged faculty to foster dialogue with students, promote reflection on prior knowledge, and reward curiosity and motivation. This laid the groundwork for developing badges that connect academic lessons to workforce skills while recognizing students' varied experiences.

To address this, the AWT4CL team created workforce badges aligned with agricultural employability skills identified by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (Crawford & Fink, 2020). These flexible badges can be adapted to course syllabi and assignments. Piloted in select agriculture courses, badges require students to reflect on and apply past experiences to specific themes. For example, students in an agriculture leadership course might reflect on a challenging conversation and connect it to conflict management practices learned in class. Earning badges motivates students by acknowledging these connections and their efforts.

Beyond pilot courses, the Agriculture Workforce Development Badges offer potential as reusable tools that tie life experiences to academic learning, helping activate prior knowledge and illustrating how co-curricular and classroom learning together support career readiness. Adopting the full badge set could address key employability skills identified by APLU. These badges enable educators to help students articulate how their experiences and education prepare them for the workforce.

For more information on using AWT4CL Agriculture Workforce Development Badges, the project's website (<https://sites.google.com/vt.edu/awt/>) offers resources. These offer practical tools to integrate skill development while celebrating diverse student experiences.

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