



A still from the I.C.E. commercial

Rebecca Hall Allensworth Redefines Work

When *The Licensing Racket* was published in 2025, author and Vanderbilt law professor Rebecca Hall Allensworth sparked a national debate. Her argument was simple but unsettling: the United States had built an occupational licensing system that often protected institutions more than the public, and in doing so, kept too many people from working in the very professions that needed them most.

Five years later, many of her predictions have come true.

Since 2025, more than half of U.S. states have revised or repealed licensing laws in fields once tightly regulated, from health support roles to technical trades. New education models, including shorter programs, modular credentials, and apprenticeship-based learning, have filled much of the gap. At the same time, the public conversation around who "deserves" to work has shifted from regulation to competency.

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Special Issue

This publication is intended to spark ideas, excitement, and critical thinking about the future of credentialing. The stories within are imagined outcomes taking place in 2030 from signals that are seen today. The concepts presented are not "positions" from I.C.E., but rather foresight visioning of possible futures.

I.C.E. Airs First Super Bowl Ad

In what commentators called "the most surprising ad of the season," the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (I.C.E.) aired a 60-second spot during Super Bowl LXIV. The commercial showcased a nurse, a pilot, a coder, and a welder, all revealing how their credentials keep the public safe, economies moving, and futures secure. The final tagline, "*Credentials: Trust You Can See*," lit up across millions of screens. By halftime, #PowerOfCredentials was trending worldwide.

Beyond the Diploma: Credentials as the New Currency of Trust

Why Traditional Education Lost Its Monopoly

In 2030, the four-year college degree no longer carries the unchallenged authority it once did. Faced with rising inequality, a shrinking middle class, and skepticism about higher education's ROI, workers and employers alike turned toward skills-based credentials as a more reliable signal of competence.

Credentialing organizations stepped into the gap, offering portable, stackable, and blockchain-secured badges that travel with workers across jobs, borders, and even career fields. For industries suffering under the talent drought, such as construction, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing, these credentials have become lifelines.

"Credentials have become the new social contract," said Dr. Lila Patterson, workforce strategist at I.C.E. "They aren't just about proving knowledge. They're about trust, safety, and ensuring equitable access to opportunity."

With reputation systems, AI-driven talent platforms, and employer analytics now influencing hiring, credentials must work harder than ever to remain relevant. But by anchoring themselves in transparency, verification, and fairness, they continue to serve as society's proof point in an era of information overload.

Weather Forecast

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Allensworth continued

“The goal was never to erase standards,” Allensworth said in a recent interview ahead of her keynote at the I.C.E. Exchange. “It was to make them relevant. We’ve learned that rules designed for a 1970s workforce can’t guide a 2030 economy.”

Her research helped frame a generation of policymaking that redefined eligibility for licensed professions. By separating safety and consumer protection from unnecessary barriers to entry, many states found they could expand their workforce without compromising quality. Yet progress has come unevenly. Several fields, including health care and education, continue to wrestle with the balance between access and accountability.

Critics note that the decline of formal licensure has produced its own challenges. In some sectors, a patchwork of private credentials has replaced state oversight, leaving employers and consumers to navigate a complex mix of standards and verification systems. “We’ve traded bureaucracy for fragmentation,” said Eli Ramos, director of the nonprofit Work Access Alliance. “It’s progress, but it’s messy.”

Allensworth remains optimistic but cautious. She believes the next phase of reform depends on cooperation between educators, employers, and credentialing organizations to create transparent systems that serve both workers and the public.

“What’s changed most,” she said, “is how we define expertise. It’s no longer about the license hanging on your wall. It’s about whether you can do the work — and prove it.”

CHROs Make the Case for Credentials and Career Mobility

How Verified Skills Drive Agility and Retention in a Tight Labor Market

When three chief human resource officers (CHROs) gathered at the 2030 Workforce Futures Summit, their message was clear: credentialing is not just a tool for compliance or recruitment. It is a lever for strategic advantage.

In an economy defined by shortages of skilled labor and rapid technological change, mobility within organizations has become as important as recruiting from outside. Verified skills, whether in the form of micro-credentials, digital badges, or advanced certifications, give employees confidence in their own competence and help them envision career progression.

“People stay when they can see a path forward,” said Kara Mendez, CHRO of a global healthcare system. “Credentials make that path visible and credible. They tell employees: your growth is recognized, and it matters.”

The CHROs highlighted how credentialing frameworks have reshaped retention strategies. No longer static, these systems integrate directly into talent development platforms, allowing employees to map skills against roles and future opportunities. That visibility has increased organizational agility, making it easier to redeploy talent during crises or pivots.

Best practices are emerging: embed credentialing in onboarding, align micro-credentials with business-critical competencies, and ensure leaders model credential achievement. “The long-term impact,” said Marcus Yoon, CHRO of a multinational tech firm, “is an organization that’s both more loyal and more flexible. Credentials have become the connective tissue between individual aspiration and business strategy.”

Content Rewind: Access, Accountability, and the Future of Work

In 2025, Professor Allensworth delivered the keynote address at the I.C.E. Future of Credentialing Workshop. Here are the primary themes from that talk.

Rebecca Hall Allensworth, Professor of Law, Vanderbilt University

Author: *The Licensing Racket: How We Decide Who Is Allowed to Work, and Why It Goes Wrong* (2025)

1. Access and Opportunity

Reducing unnecessary barriers to entry while keeping the public protected remains central to reform. “We can uphold standards without closing doors,” Allensworth says.

2. Accountability Without Overreach

Licensure, certification, and credentialing systems must balance public trust with fairness to workers. Oversight, she argues, should measure competence, not compliance.

3. Redefining Education

Shorter learning models and stackable credentials have reconnected education with employability. Allensworth highlights how modular pathways have opened professions once limited to four-year degrees.

4. The Ongoing Question of Trust

As states shift power from government boards to private credentialing systems, maintaining public confidence has become the defining challenge of the decade.



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Reader Opinion

Reflections on certification, c. 2030.

Tom Granatir and Shannon Carter

Since 2025, changes in education, assessment, and workplace learning have transformed how people are educated and train for jobs. Driven largely by shifting workforce demands, changing demographics, and the widespread adoption of AI technologies, the nature of work is fundamentally different. How we define the contours of a job and how we assess and validate the skills necessary to do them, are unrecognizable from just a decade ago. In the process, certification has been transformed from a transactional event to a mechanism for supporting professionals in navigating a complex and unpredictable career journey.

Certification once sat as a gate between training and the workplace to validate the acquisition of defined knowledge and skills. Now it looks more like a system of assessment, supporting learners from the beginning to the end of their careers.

We once relied on single, point in time, high-stakes assessments, which seemed the only way to make a consequential classification decision. But once we learned that knowledge and skills decay, and the workplace demand for cognitive agility and rapid acquisition of new skills, we had to transform recertification into a continuous, ongoing process. Public users of certification demand that it represents the current state of expertise, not the end of training.

Here are just some of the fundamental changes we have made:

- Where once we examined only knowledge and cognitive expertise, we now examine all the skills and behaviors necessary for expert performance, including procedural, analytical, communication, and teamwork skills. Certification is now multimodal.
- We used to structure education around time and classes and experiences. We now know that acquiring and applying new knowledge and skills is highly personal, as is the ability to retain that level of mastery. New forms of assessment made it possible to personalize educational experiences based on individualized learning plans.
- Personalized education required personalized assessment. We formerly industrialized assessments for populations of trainees; now we personalize testing for individual candidates. New technologies have enhanced test security and increased the specificity of our validation of expertise.

In this way testing became systematic, continuous, individualized, multimodal, and designed for learning, enhancing the role of the certifying board in validation of professional expertise, while continuing to make the essential classification judgement about whether the certificant can demonstrate the expertise required for effective practice.

So, how did we navigate this fundamental role change?

- We reframed our relationships with membership societies, learning institutions, testing partners, and licensing boards, to create a collaborative and interdependent network with a shared commitment to workforce readiness, sustainability, and competence.
- We created assessment systems that were more integrated, iterative, and formative, while protecting the autonomy of educational institutions and certifying bodies to deliver on their missions.
- We traded the artificial measures of seat-time and summative testing for ongoing, competency-based learner-centric, customized, and objective evaluations.

It was not without financial and reputational risk to abandon what we believed to be our core function—testing. But we have replaced it with an assessment platform that better serves all stakeholders, including certificants, employers, and public beneficiaries, and delivers a valid, reliable, adaptive, and up-to-date validation of professional expertise.

Looking Back: How the Future of Credentialing Took Shape

A 2023 report from I.C.E. planted the seeds of foresight that still guide credentialing today

When the *Future of Credentialing* report was first released in 2023, few could have guessed how quickly it would influence the field. Today, in 2030, it is often cited as the spark that pushed credentialing organizations to think beyond incremental improvements and begin planning boldly for the future.

In an interview, Denise Roosendaal, executive director of I.C.E. at the time and currently, recalled how the effort began. “The board was already very strategic,” she explained, “but we needed a way to help organizations look further ahead. We were great at building a better program, but not always at preparing for what was coming.”

Drawing inspiration from ASAE’s ForesightWorks, Roosendaal brought the idea of a foresight-focused report to the I.C.E. board. Funding was limited, so the team zeroed in on three tightly defined drivers: credentials under pressure, technology innovation, and government and credentialing. A small advisory group worked with the consulting firm Foresight Alliance to conduct research, test concepts through interviews, and write the paper. Importantly, I.C.E. members themselves authored the “Take Action” sections, grounding the report in practical next steps.

The report’s release was deliberately provocative. I.C.E. paired it with tools to help leaders put it to use, including a facilitator’s guide, customizable slide decks, and a “Thinking Like a Futurist” webinar. Adoption was strong, especially among CEOs, consultants, and testing vendors. Within months, boards were using the prioritization survey to identify which challenges mattered most to them.

Looking back, Roosendaal noted two surprises: how quickly topics like AI and credential aggregators became reality, and how essential it was to build a culture of foresight inside organizations. “The real power,” she said, “wasn’t just in the report. It was in learning to ask what’s next, and to do it together.”

The project established a core guiding principle that I.C.E. uses today: tell our story well about the value of credentialing. “If we had not taken the steps to create simple, easy-to-share, talking points about how important credentialing is to society,” Roosendaal stated, “we would have certainly felt the impacts of public policy in the past few years.”

Today, with hindsight, it’s clear: I.C.E. didn’t just publish a paper. It seeded a movement that continues to shape how the profession prepares for whatever comes next.

Feature Story: Credentials as Streetwear The Rise of *Trade Chic*

Why Gen Z and Gen Alpha Are Wearing Their Skills on Their Sleeves

Move over, luxury logos. 2020s designer handbags are out, and hard hats are in. Credentials, once tucked away in résumés and HR files, have become a full-blown fashion statement. Gen Z and Gen Alpha are flaunting their achievements not only online but also on hoodies, sneakers, and digital avatars. Welding certifications stitched onto varsity jackets, cosmetology badges glowing on wristbands, electrician licenses embroidered on caps. Credential culture has gone couture.

Influencers on TikTok and ThreadVR are calling it “Skillcore.” The aesthetic borrows from both workwear and streetwear, but with a twist: every patch, print, or hologram represents a verified credential. The message? Competence is fashionable, and in a world where trust is currency, credentialing is the new status symbol.

“Look, anyone can buy a knockoff luxury bag,” said Lexi Swan, 23, a tattoo artist and licensed esthetician in Chicago, flashing her certification badge stitched onto her cropped jacket. “But when people see this credential on my sleeve, they know I earned it. It’s like wearing proof that you’re legit.”

The movement has also been fueled by technology. With smart glasses and mixed-reality overlays, credentials now appear not just in fabric but in real time. Walk into a coffee shop and your barista’s food safety certification hovers above their apron. Enter a construction site and the crane operator’s safety license appears as a holographic patch over their vest. Fashion brands have caught on, creating clothing lines with embedded NFC chips that link to credential wallets.

“This generation grew up online where authenticity is everything,” explained Dr. Jordan Morales, a sociologist studying youth culture at Georgetown University. “For them, credentials are not dusty plaques. They’re cultural capital. Wearing them is like saying: I’ve put in the work. I can prove it.”

Even celebrities are leaning in. Pop star Nia Cruz sparked headlines when she wore a custom gown to the Met Gala embroidered with her certified welding credential, a nod to her pre-fame training in industrial arts. The look trended instantly, with fans posting, ‘*She’s literally certified slay.*’

Not everyone is convinced. Some critics worry that turning credentials into fashion could trivialize them. But advocates argue the opposite: that making them visible reinforces their value. “If kids grow up wanting to wear their trade school badge the way they used to want Gucci, that’s a win,” said Miguel Santos, a union electrician and credentialing advocate.

In fact, credentialing organizations are watching the trend closely. I.C.E., long a thought leader in the space, has even convened a design challenge exploring how credential display technologies can merge with culture.

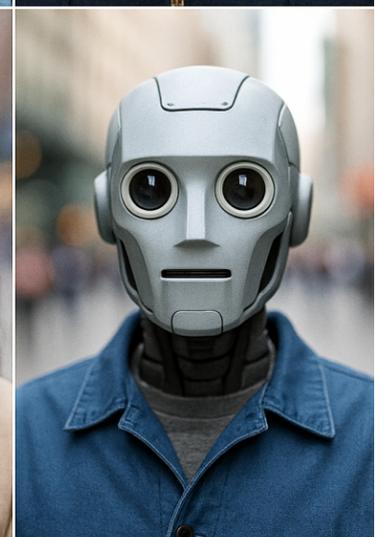
The result is a new kind of prestige economy. In the same way a logo once signaled wealth, a credential now signals skill, trust, and employability. “It’s not about flexing money anymore,” said Tran. “It’s about flexing mastery.”

One thing is certain: in 2030, the most fashionable accessory isn’t a handbag or a sneaker drop. It’s competence, worn loud, proud, and certified.

Voices on the Street Why Are Credentials Important in 2030?

We asked four everyday citizens - two human, one student, and one machine - what credentials mean to them today.

- “My credential tells employers I can handle crises and skill-shift at the same time. That’s not just paper—it’s proof.” — Janelle, 29, HR Manager
- “I skipped college, stacked micro-badges in cybersecurity, and now I’m six figures deep in a job I love. Credentials changed the game for me.” — Marco, 22, Ethical Hacker
- “Every badge I’ve earned makes me feel like I’m building my future, step by step. It’s like leveling up in real life.” — Aaliyah, 17, High School Senior
- “01001000 01110101 01101101 01100001 01101110 00100000 01110110 01100001 01101100 01101001 01100100 01100001 01110100 01100101 01100100. Translation: Credentials confirm my human partners are competent. This increases my trust matrix by 37%.” — XR-7, Servicebot



Stackable Credentials, Building Careers One Step at a Time

From College Add-Ons to the Core of Workforce Strategy

Stackable credentials were once treated as academic novelties, a short course here, a digital badge there. By 2030, they've become the scaffolding of entire careers. Instead of functioning as isolated certifications or end-of-program capstones, stackable credentials are increasingly embedded directly into degree programs. Students can now graduate with both a diploma and a suite of industry certifications that translate immediately into credit-bearing, employer-recognized skills.

The concept has matured beyond theory into practice. Fast, targeted micro-credentials now serve as on-ramps to entry-level jobs, while ladder certifications create structured advancement pathways. "It's about turning education into a career lattice, not just a career ladder," said Jared Okafor, VP of Talent Strategy at a Fortune 500 manufacturer. Yet adoption hasn't been automatic. Employers had to shift away from using degrees as blunt filters and begin embracing skills-based hiring. That transition required advocacy from credentialing organizations, which pushed for certifications to be integrated into HR systems and hiring algorithms.

The payoff is profound: workers can now build, stack, and customize their skillsets over time, adjusting to the speed of economic change. For employers, stackable credentials have become a hedge against disruption, ensuring that their workforce evolves alongside their business needs. As Okafor noted, "Stackable credentials mean we no longer have to choose between education and employment. They're fused into the same journey."

Global, Digital, Dynamic The Next Era of Credentialing

Why Life-Long Recognition of Skills Is Becoming the Global Standard

The credentialing landscape of 2030 bears little resemblance to the static certifications of the past. Instead, it is global, digital, and relentlessly dynamic. Credentials now track learning across a lifetime, capturing not just formal degrees but micro-skills, experiential learning, and cross-border qualifications. Advances in digital verification and blockchain platforms have made credentials both portable and tamper-proof, while AI-driven assessment tools measure performance in real time.

Assessment innovation has been key. Instead of one-time exams, dynamic credentials reflect ongoing measures of progress, with continuous skill updates embedded into professional practice. "We don't just test for competence anymore," explained Denise Roosendaal, executive director at I.C.E. "We measure growth, adaptation, and the ability to evolve with your profession."

Globalization has also raised the stakes. With Asia now producing the majority of STEM graduates and employers competing for talent worldwide, credentials have become both passports and gatekeepers. The challenge is ensuring alignment across borders without sacrificing local trust.

For credentialing organizations, technology has been both a challenge and an opportunity. AI and data analytics now support life-long learning pathways, while digital ecosystems ensure that credentials remain in lockstep with workforce needs.

The future, as credential leaders frame it, is not about one-off certifications but about building systems that recognize the full arc of human capability. In a volatile, skills-driven economy, credentials have become the most reliable compass.

The Human Factor: Certifying What Machines Can't Do

How Credentialing Pivoted in the Age of Automation

Robots can diagnose, translate, and assemble with superhuman precision. But as automation crept up the value chain, the skills that could not be automated; empathy, leadership, ethical reasoning; became the most prized.

Credentialing bodies responded by building frameworks to measure and validate uniquely human capabilities. Emotional intelligence badges, team leadership credentials, and certifications in "human-robot collaboration" are now standard in many industries.

"Automation didn't erase jobs — it reshaped them," said Charles Davis, president of the Global Federation of Credentials. "What people needed was a way to prove they could do what machines couldn't. That's where credentials became essential."

Associations found themselves on the front lines of defending humanity's role in work. By setting ethical standards for AI systems and creating anticipatory intelligence models to forecast emerging human skills, they ensured that credentials remained the gold standard of professional identity, even in a world awash in algorithms.

The Promise and Peril of Continuous Assessment

When the National Health Competency Board lost its landmark lawsuit earlier this year, it sent shockwaves through the credentialing field. The board had used an AI system to design and score portions of its recertification exams, arguing the technology made assessment more objective. A group of certified professionals disagreed, claiming the system's algorithms misinterpreted open-ended responses and produced inconsistent scores. The court agreed, citing a lack of human oversight in validating the results.

The case underscored both the promise and the risk of the new assessment era. In the 2030 workplace, evaluation no longer happens once every few years. Skills are measured continually, through digital simulations, real-time performance data, and on-the-job observation tools that feed into longitudinal profiles. Advocates say this gives a fuller picture of competence over time, replacing snapshots with stories.

But the same systems that make assessment more dynamic also raise new concerns. Data ownership, privacy, and algorithmic bias have become the central debates of modern credentialing. Even as technology allows for more accurate measurement of technical ability, questions linger about who interprets the data and how much trust should be placed in machines.

"Automation can support good judgment, but it can't replace it," says Dr. Leah Kaminski, chief psychometrician at Meridian Credentialing Services. "When we remove people from the process entirely, we also remove context. And context is what makes assessment fair."

For many, the National Health case wasn't about one failed system. It was about what happens when the certifiers of human skill start to look a little less human themselves.

The Future Without Occupational Licenses

How National Certification Replaced State Control

By 2035, the U.S. will have largely moved beyond occupational licensing. Once, nearly one in four workers needed a state license — creating barriers that limited mobility, innovation, and opportunity. But as states face pressure to modernize, many are replacing licensing systems with national certifications emphasizing competence over compliance — a shift long promoted by libertarian organizations that viewed licensing as government overreach and economic protectionism.

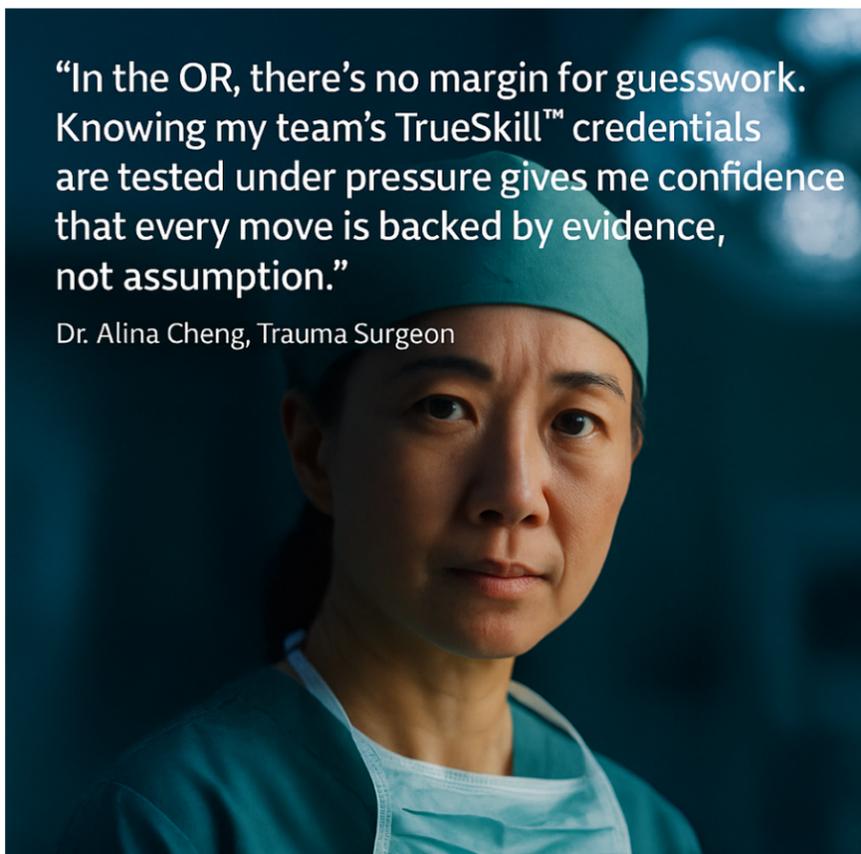
Organizations like the National Commission for Certifying Agencies now set broad standards, while industry-specific bodies such as the National Certification Council for Athletic Training and the Financial Competency and Ethics Authority identify qualified professionals in their fields. Instead of applying for a license in each state, individuals demonstrate competence through standardized exams, digital portfolios, and continuing education recognized nationwide.

AI-driven credentialing platforms, developed in partnership with the U.S. Workforce Innovation Agency and National Institute for Digital Standards and Security, are transforming this landscape. Workers maintain verified “skill wallets” that employers and consumers can instantly check — replacing paper licenses with real-time proof of competence. This evolution enables greater flexibility, workforce mobility, and adaptation to emerging industries like AI ethics and cyber safety.

Still, debate persists: Does deregulation risk public safety, or does it finally hold professionals accountable through transparent data? Advocates argue that digital oversight ensures continuous evaluation, while critics warn that human judgment and ethics can't be reduced to algorithms. As digital verification becomes the norm, will “licensing” itself become obsolete, replaced by dynamic, data-driven credentials that redefine trust in the workforce?

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Special Report: Empathy, Graded

How the Quest to Measure Human Skills Broke the Workforce

In the late 2020s, “durable skills” were hailed as the salvation of an automated economy. As machines mastered technical work, employers turned to what only humans could offer: empathy, collaboration, judgment, and creativity. Credentialing bodies rushed to meet the demand, promising tools to validate these elusive traits. But in the race to measure what makes people human, something essential was lost.

Today, nearly every major employer requires proof of “empathy proficiency.” Applicants upload soft-skill certificates with their résumés. AI-based interview platforms rate “emotional authenticity” and “team orientation.” The original intent was noble. Psychometricians and behavioral scientists sought to elevate qualities long dismissed as “soft.” Yet as these systems scaled, the metrics hardened. What could be observed became what mattered.

When the Metric Becomes the Goal

It sounded like a great idea at the time. Wristbands in training simulations tracked micro-expressions and vocal tone to produce an empathy score. Real-time feedback was meant to sharpen the human touch: a warm tone, a well-placed nod, a short pause before responding. But users quickly learned what the system wanted and adjusted accordingly. The result wasn't empathy; it was performance.

“The irony,” says Ravi Deshmukh, Chief Standards Officer at Global Skills X-Change, “is that the better our instruments got, the worse our outcomes became. We optimized for measurement, not meaning.”

It's hard to blame participants. With job scarcity at an all-time high, outperforming the next person is survival. The empathy score isn't just feedback; it's a benchmark that determines who stays employed.

Meanwhile, bias is baked in. Algorithms modeled on historical communication patterns favor Western speech rhythms and neurotypical interaction styles. Candidates from other cultures, or those who communicate differently, routinely score lower on “emotional intelligence.”

A decade ago, credentialing leaders sought to shape the future of work by championing lifelong learning and human development. Today, they're reckoning with a system that equates empathy with compliance and creativity with conformity. The promise of durable skills was to make work more human. The reality, in too many cases, has made it less so.

The Empathy Economy, By the Numbers

87% — Employers now using biometric or AI-based “empathy scoring” tools in hiring and promotion decisions.

36% — Employees who say they feel genuinely understood at work, down from 68% in 2025.

\$14.3 billion — Annual global revenue for “human skills assessment” platforms, surpassing traditional technical testing for the first time.

63% — Credentialing organizations offering at least one certification or micro-credential in “durable skills” such as empathy, adaptability, or communication.

11 — Ongoing lawsuits alleging bias or discrimination in AI-driven soft skill assessments.

Special Report:

How Credentials Became a New Currency in the 2030 Economy

When tuition rates flattened but never fell, and college enrollment dropped for the seventh year in a row, the economy adjusted in ways few predicted. By 2030, credentials have become the most common form of workforce validation in the United States and, increasingly, one of the most debated.

What began as a response to rising college costs and a shrinking labor pool has turned into a structural shift. Employers now build teams through a mix of degree-holders, certified specialists, and micro-credentialed contractors. The result is a more flexible labor market, but also a more fragmented one.

“The old question of ‘Do you have a degree?’ has been replaced with ‘What can you prove you can do?’” says Ariana Mills, chief economist at the Workforce Futures Institute, a nonprofit that tracks labor credentials and earnings trends. “That shift opened doors for millions who couldn’t afford traditional education, but it also introduced new inequalities in quality and recognition.”

The Rise of the Credentialed Workforce

In 2030, credentialing is no longer an alternative path, it’s the mainstream. The Bureau of Labor Data and Skills reports that more than 60 percent of employed adults now hold at least one professional or occupational credential beyond a degree. Healthcare, technology, and advanced manufacturing remain the heaviest users, but credentialing has expanded into fields like logistics, education, and the arts.

For employers, the payoff is measurable. Credentialed workers enter the job faster, require less onboarding, and show higher retention in their first three years. For individuals, the average wage gain after earning a recognized credential still sits at 9 to 12 percent. Those gains, however, vary widely depending on the certifying body and its reputation.

The College Correction

The slow contraction of higher education continues to shape this shift. Many universities now operate as hybrid institutions: part college, part credentialing hub. Degree programs have splintered into modular courses that issue micro-credentials at each stage. Some institutions have become direct partners with certification boards, embedding credentials into degree pathways to keep enrollment viable.

“The smartest universities figured out that credentials could save them,” says David Huang, provost of the National Institute for Applied Learning, a network of regional campuses and online programs. “We stopped fighting them and started aligning with them. Students want proof of skill, not just proof of attendance.”

But the new economy has also exposed gaps. Employers still struggle to compare credentials that vary in rigor and recognition. Some hiring managers admit they value a certificate from a familiar university more than an independent credential, even if both validate the same skill. The result is a marketplace rich in choice but short on consistency.

An Uneven Opportunity

For all its promise, the credential economy is not immune to imbalance. Workers with access to employer-funded credential programs continue to advance, while those without institutional support face new financial burdens. A growing number of private-sector credentials carry maintenance fees or recertification costs that rival community college tuition.

“There’s a myth that credentials democratized opportunity,” says Marisol Vega, a labor policy analyst at EquiWork Research Collaborative. “In some cases, they did. But in others, they’ve just shifted the cost from the university to the individual.”

Still, few argue that credentialing has been bad for the economy. A 2030 Skills Council report credits the rise of credentials with helping close the skilled worker gap that plagued the early 2020s. Fields like renewable energy, cybersecurity, and behavioral health grew faster than predicted largely because certification pathways kept pace with demand.

A Future to Prove

As the line between learning and earning continues to blur, the credentialing community faces a familiar challenge: maintaining trust. The industry’s credibility — once its greatest advantage — depends on clarity about what each credential represents and how it connects to real economic outcomes.

In an era when credentials can be earned, verified, and shared in a single click, the question isn’t whether they will shape the economy. It’s whether they will continue to hold their value.

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CEPNet Scheduled Maintenance Set for July 2030

On July 15, 2030, the Competency and Experience Network (CEPNet) will experience its second major maintenance window. The CEPNet Board reports that between 12:00 EST July 15 and roughly 12:00 EST July 16, the 2030 version of CEPNet will propagate through the Ethereum blockchain upon which CEPNet is based. CEPNet is the ledger of Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) performed by participating professionals.

Institutional stakeholders, such as schools and employers will see some changes to the user experience now that CEPNet will support NCCA's 2029 Competency Modeling standard. This enhancement to the 2026 Competency Modeling standard adds bidirectional competency prerequisites and specifies competency obsolescence and forgetting parameters. The 2029 standard also incorporates some of the changes that open doors to non-medical credentials, such as organization-defined technical and behavioral context variables. The CEPNET Institutional portal was updated in June 2029 to allow organizations to include the additional metadata in their competency models in anticipation of the rollout of the new standard across the chain.

The 2030 CEPNet App will introduce increased thermal sensitivity for the Verbal Comprehension (VComp) assessment. The VComp is becoming the standard for assessing the success of patient / provider information exchange. Initial versions of the VComp assessment monitored for verbal signs of comprehension (e.g., "Do you understand?" "Yes") to gauge patient comprehension. With the increased thermal sensitivity analysis, VComp will now measure skin temperature to discern between patients who actually comprehend and those who are merely deferring to provider authority. Thermal baseline data has been captured on the CEPNet chain since 2027. VComp has been instrumental in prescribing remedial communications training and peer mentoring among certified practitioners. The new version of CEPNet App is available now to download. The current version will cease to interact with the CEPNet backbone by December 31, 2030.



CEPNet Compliant

Every second counts in high-risk environments.

SafeLink Wear™ integrates biometric monitoring with certification data to detect fatigue, track adherence to safety protocols, and alert supervisors before accidents happen. Worn by workers in manufacturing, construction, and energy sectors, it is part guardian, part credential, and fully accountable.

When protection and performance work together, everyone goes home safe.

SafeLink Wear™ Built for those who build the world.

Top 10 Technologies Credentialing Professionals Can't Live Without (2030 Edition)

Based on the 2030 Future of Credentialing Survey of more than 2,000 professionals across certification, testing, and workforce development sectors.

1. CEPNet Wallets

No more email chains or lost PDFs. These encrypted digital wallets hold every credential, micro-cert, and renewal record in one portable profile.

2. CertiSense™ Workplace Hubs

Embedded sensors track real-world performance data, feeding directly into longitudinal assessments and continuous learning systems.

3. SafeLink Wear™ Wearables

Mandatory in high-risk industries, these biometric monitors track fatigue, attention, and stress preventing accidents before they happen.

4. AI Co-Assessors

Every major testing organization now pairs human psychometricians with AI models to generate, validate, and review assessment items in real time.

5. Transparent Credential Dashboards

Dynamic verification systems let employers see not just what someone learned, but how those competencies connect to real-world outcomes.

6. Translation Mesh Networks Powered by Airpods

A global assessment breakthrough: instant translation of tests, feedback, and instructions into more than 80 languages, closing access gaps worldwide.

7. Human + Skill Simulators

Neuro-haptic gloves and VR scenarios now assess teamwork, empathy, and critical decision-making through real interaction, not just written exams.

8. Learning Sherpa Bots

Virtual concierges that guide candidates through every stage of certification: scheduling, study prep, renewals, and occasionally offer pep talks.

9. NeuroLearn Headsets

Once niche, now standard. These adaptive neural devices tailor professional development to each user's cognitive style, supporting multiple careers over a lifetime.

10. The Ethics Engine™

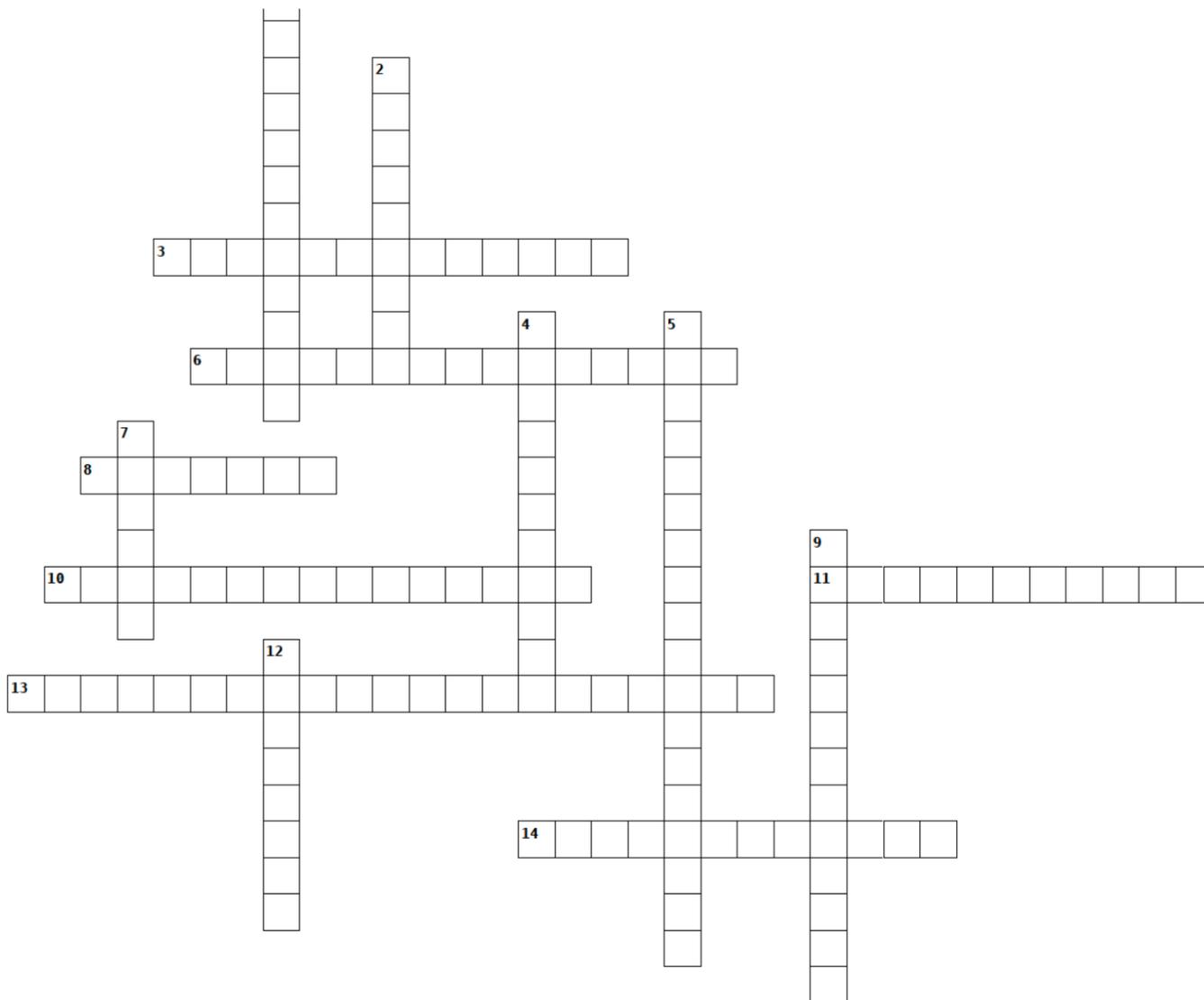
An AI-powered compliance layer used by most accrediting bodies to flag potential conflicts, bias, or overreach in credentialing systems. It's a watchdog built into the workflow.

Fun & Games

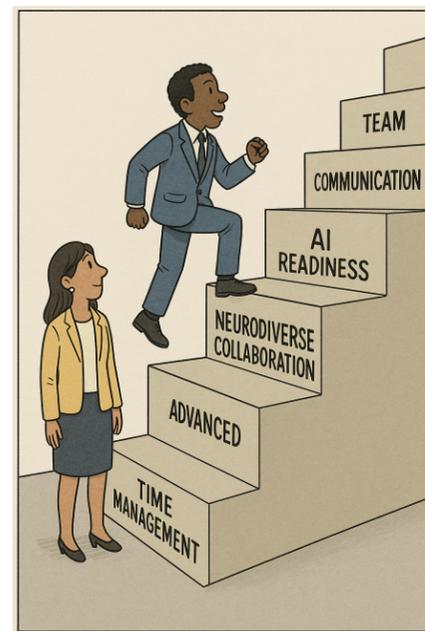
Monday, 17 November 2030

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Credentialing Crossword



Certified Chuckles



I think level 8 unlocks a new job title!

Across

3. The independent process of verifying a person's competence through testing or evaluation
6. The ongoing requirement for professionals to stay current in their field
8. The standard that defines quality for assessment-based certificate programs
10. A short, stackable recognition awarded for demonstrating a specific skill
11. One of I.C.E.' core values, alongside Community and Competence
13. A professional who designs learning programs, courses, and assessments
14. A verified proof of learning or competency

Down

1. The science behind test design, fairness, and data-driven credibility
2. The strategic practice I.C.E. uses to anticipate and prepare for emerging trends
4. I.C.E.'s annual gathering for networking, education, and dialogue
5. The practice of collecting and interpreting data to understand workforce trends
7. The professional certification offer by I.C.E. for credentialing experts
9. The formal process of validating that a program meets established standards
12. The approach of combining multiple credentials to build career mobility

Weekly Credential Confidence Index

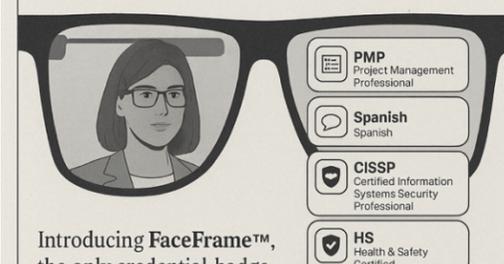
17 November 2030

- 92% of employers say verified credentials are their most trusted indicator of workforce quality.
- 87% report that credentialed professionals demonstrate higher adaptability in emerging technologies.
- 73% cite credential transparency as a deciding factor in hiring partnerships.

Insight of the week: *"The shift from proving what people know to proving what they can do has redefined the value of work."*

— I.C.E. Future of Credentialing Study Series, 2030

Meet Your FaceFrame™ Credential Profile



Introducing **FaceFrame™**, the only credential-badge display built for the era of smart glasses. When someone looks at you, your verified badges appear in a sleek sidebar—professional certifications, language fluencies, even safety clearances—automatically updated in real time. No more fumbling with resumes or business cards. With **FaceFrame™**, your credibility walks into the room *before* you even say hello.

FaceFrame™: Because your expertise deserves to be seen.

CEPNet Compatible



Institute for Credentialing Excellence

The Future of Credentialing Starts with **You**

Help turn today's foresight into tomorrow's reality; or help prevent the futures we don't want to see. Join us and be part of the conversation shaping what credentialing becomes next.

The **Institute for Credentialing Excellence (I.C.E.)** is the professional community advancing standards, innovation, and leadership across certification and certificate programs. Through education, research, and collaboration, I.C.E. connects the people and ideas driving quality and trust in credentialing.

Scan the QR code to explore resources, read the *Future of Credentialing* report, and find upcoming opportunities to engage.

Because the future isn't just coming. We're building it together.

(It's also where we've placed the answer key for the crossword).



A special **Thank You** to the following I.C.E. volunteers who served on the Future of Credentialing Summit Advisory Panel for 2025. Your dedication, innovative thinking, and strategic perspective made all the difference.

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