



# Credential clout: How higher ed can prepare for an evolving job market

A SURVEY OF U.S. STUDENTS  
AND RECRUITERS



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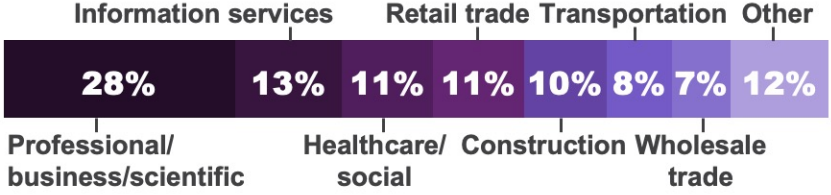
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# Survey methodology

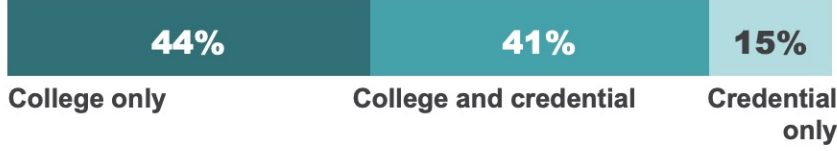
**500** 

**U.S. recruiters/hiring managers who fill salaried positions**



**500** 

**U.S. students aged 18-45 who are enrolled in a degree or credential program**



The survey fielding was managed by Wakefield Research via email invitation and online survey among U.S. students and recruiters/hiring managers between January 15 and January 25, 2019. The margin for error for results is +/- 4.4 percentage points for the students and recruiter samples at a 95% confidence level.

# Evolving perceptions of college degrees

Students are enrolling in college to **improve their career prospects**, but they wonder if they're learning skills that will **prepare them for the workforce**.



At the same time, employers are beginning to **value other educational programs on par with a traditional degree**.

To ensure that institutions continue to provide value to students entering an evolving workforce, they should consider offering **a lifelong learning model** that allows for traditional degree attainment alongside micro-learning opportunities.



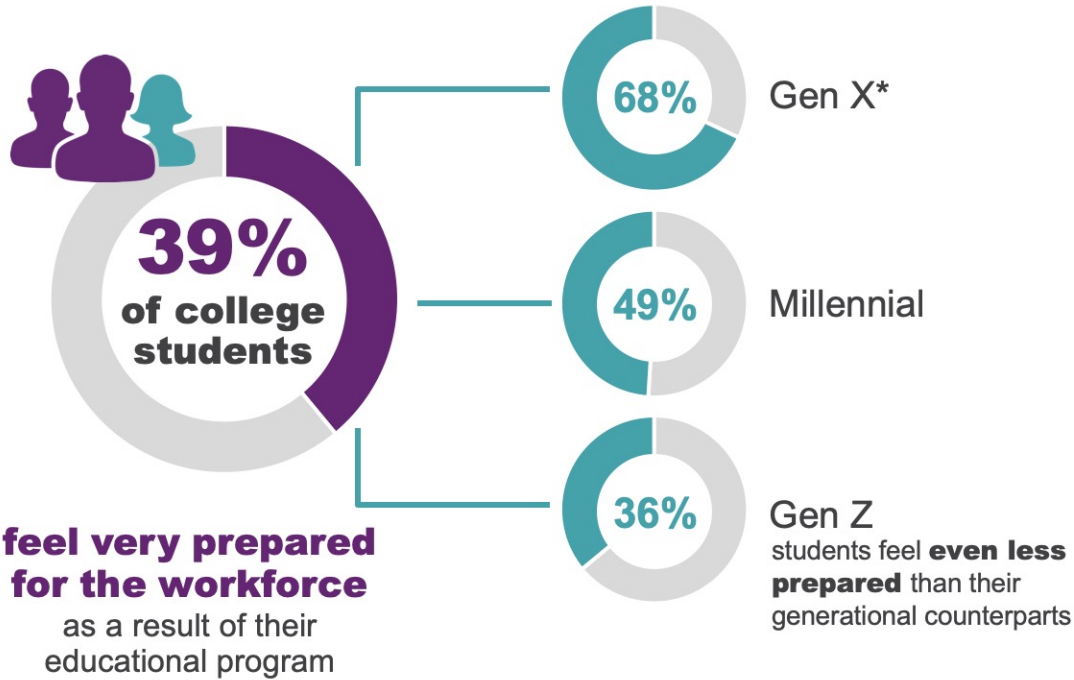


# The top reason students enroll in college is to **improve their career prospects**

## Reasons that students are currently attending college:



# ...but they worry they aren't prepared



\*Denotes a directional finding.



# In contrast, the majority of employers think their new hires have what it takes

62%

of recruiters are very confident that candidates have the skills to succeed



While all recruiters reported believing that candidates with a college degree have more skills than those without, **only a third of organizations** require a degree for entry-level positions, and **a quarter accept credentials in place of a degree.**

## Entry-level positions requiring college degree (on average)

35%

All organizations

48%

≥ 1,000 employees\*

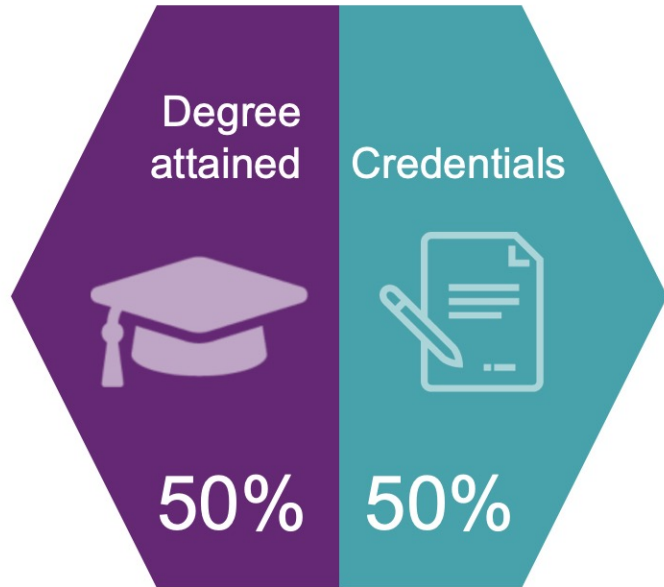
33%

< 1,000 employees

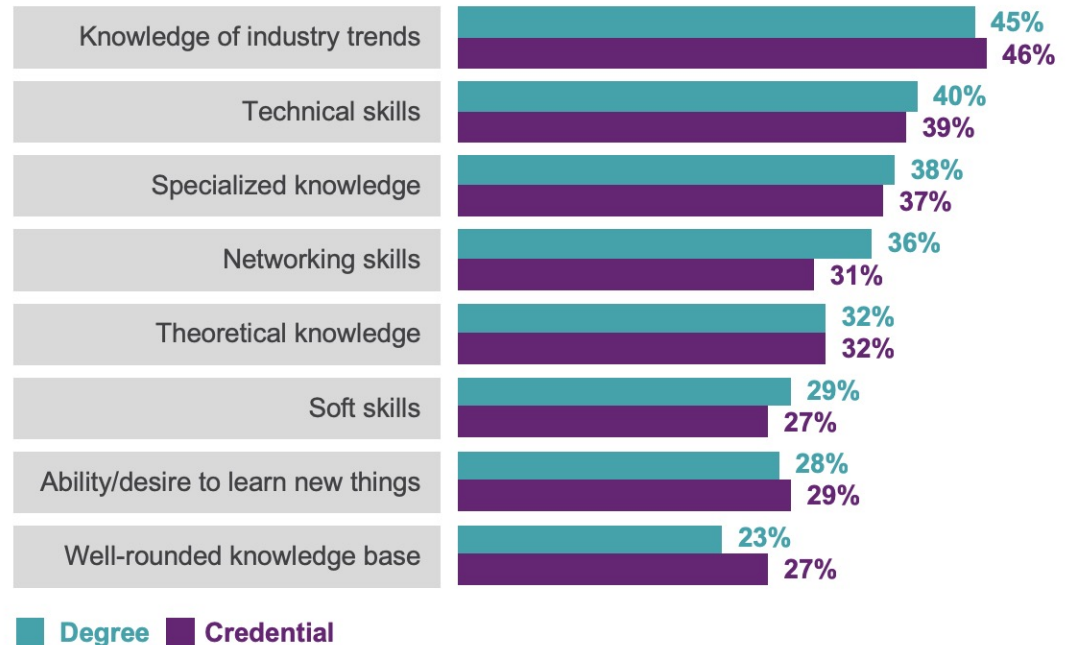
\*Denotes a directional finding.

# Overall, employers give **equal value** to credentials and degrees

## What is a better read of a job candidate's qualifications?



## Recruiters find the top qualities of credential and degree candidates to be similar





# Seeking soft skills



As technology continues to reshape the workforce, and as it becomes more difficult to predict future needs, **additional emphasis is being placed on soft skills.**

These transferable skills—such as **communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving**—are sought by students and recruiters alike, and may be the key to a sustainable career path.

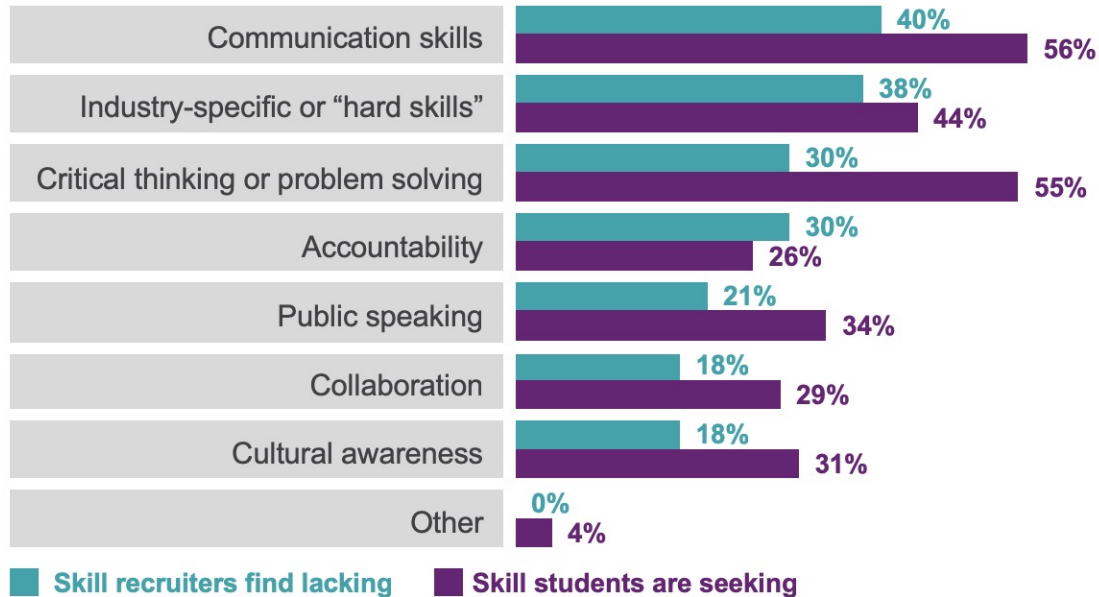


Institutions are already aware of the soft-skills gap and are **taking the initiative to integrate these areas into many courses** of study that traditionally focused on hard skills only.

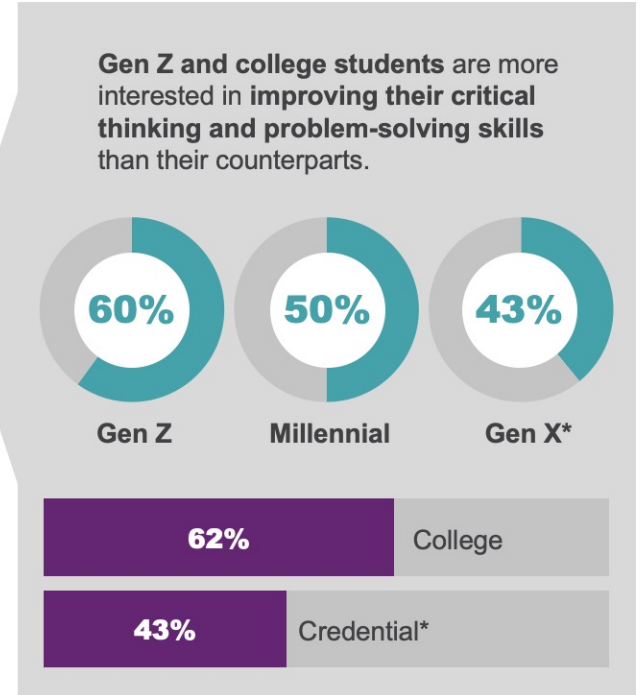


# Employers and students agree that **soft skills are important**

Two of the top three skills recruiters say are lacking, communication and critical thinking, are soft skills students seek to learn in their educational programs.



\*Denotes a directional finding.



# The importance of lifelong learning

Today's students understand that continuous learning is key to **staying relevant in the workplace.**

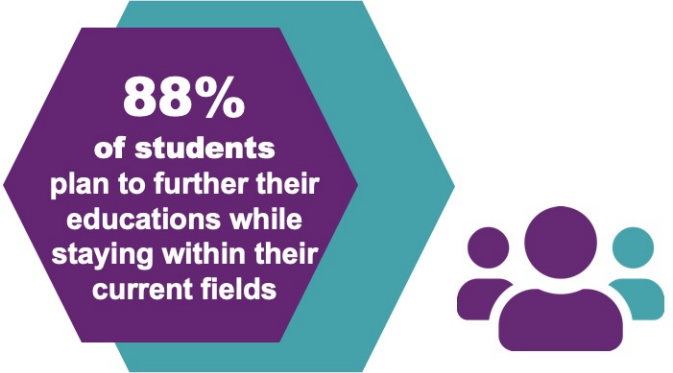
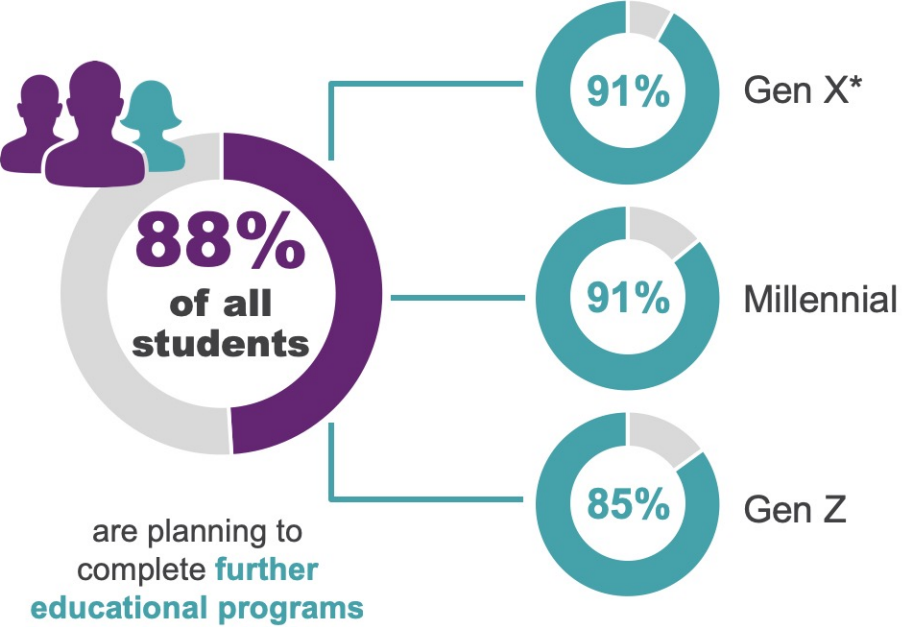


They're on the same wavelength as employers regarding the lifespan of a degree or certification and how often **additional educational programs are needed for career progression.**

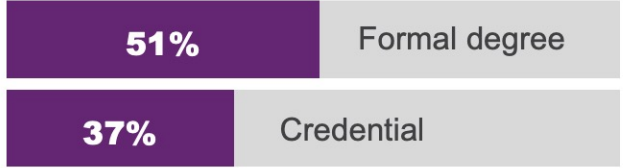
Many institutions are **investing in post-degree programs** to fill this demand and offering online courses to accommodate working students' schedules.



# The majority of students plan to pursue a degree or credential after their current educational program—a trend that is especially true for older students



## Programs of study students plan to pursue:



\*Denotes a directional finding.

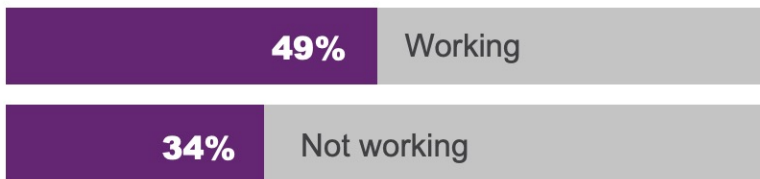
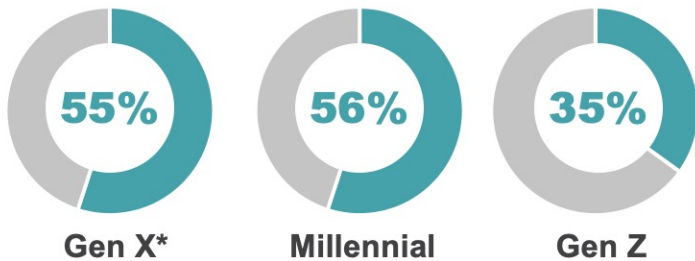




Students and recruiters agree that to remain relevant, **employees should take further educational or credentialing programs an average of two years after completing an educational program**

## 45% of students

think further education is needed more than once a year to stay relevant in the workplace:



## 39% of recruiters

think further education is needed more than once a year to stay relevant in the workplace



\*Denotes a directional finding.

# Students and recruiters value credentials

**Credentials are growing in popularity** as students consider time to value for their educational investments.



Many students are **combining degrees and credentials** to meet their goals.

Employers, too, **see value** in macro- and micro-educational programs.

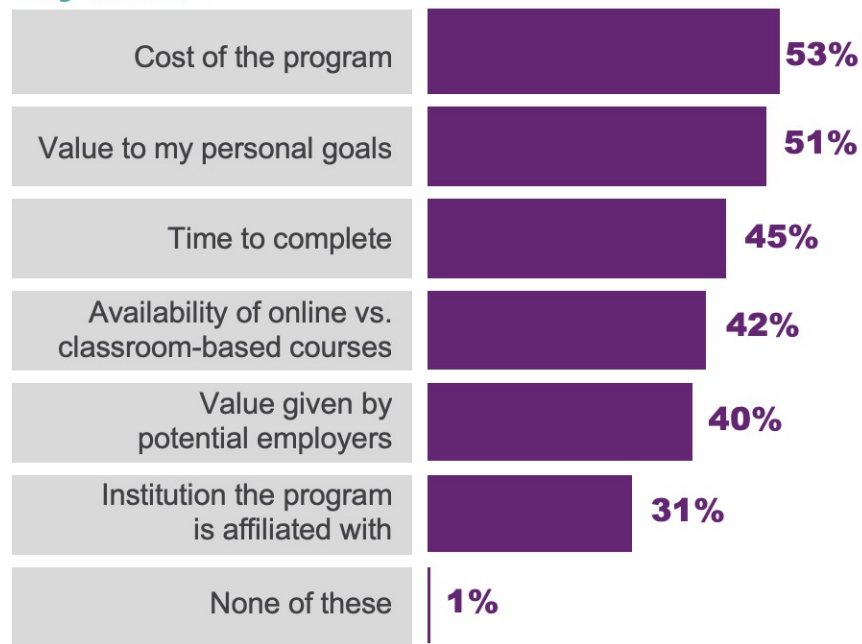


To **remain competitive**, institutions should invest in technology to support **both degree and credentialing programs**.

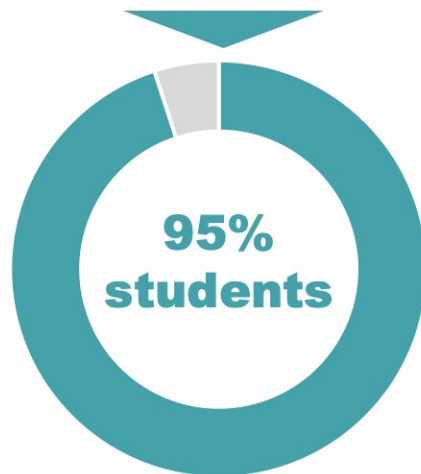


When considering future educational programs, **cost** and **time to completion** are two of the top three factors for students

### Key factors

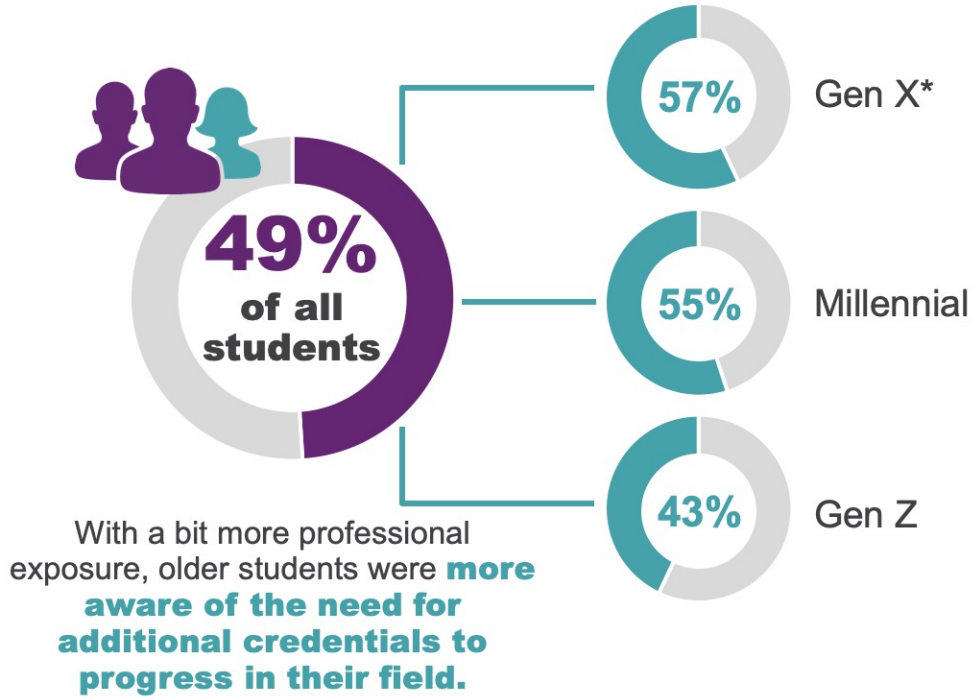


The vast majority of students in a degree program think that **obtaining a credential on top of a degree** will make them **more specialized in their field**



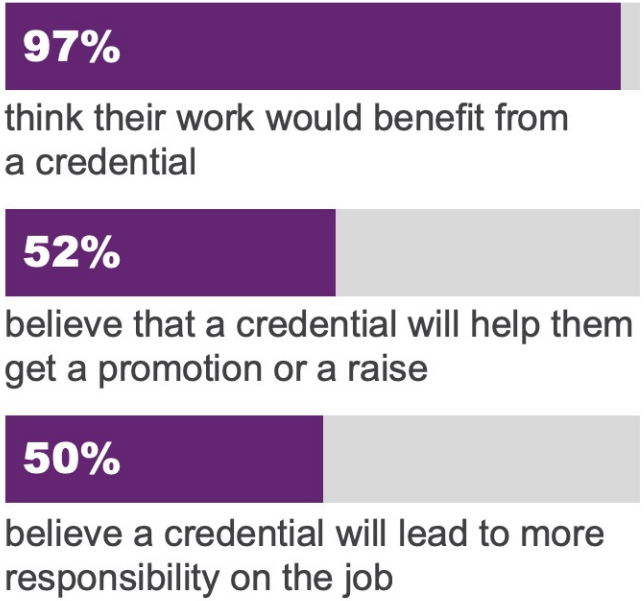
Nearly all recruiters **agree** with this opinion

# Nearly half of students believe that credentials are **essential to meeting their future career goals**



\*Denotes a directional finding.

## Working students see the benefits of credentials:





Recruiters believe **credentials will carry more weight** moving forward, eventually becoming a standard in the hiring process

**In the next  
5 years:**



**85%**

**of employers believe**  
that more candidates applying  
for jobs at their organization will  
have credentials in addition  
to a college degree



**97%**

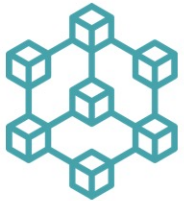
**of U.S. recruiters believe**  
that credentials will be important  
in their company's consideration  
of whether to hire someone  
over a candidate without  
credentials

# The rising popularity of digital delivery



Hard copies of degrees and credentials still hold value, but **businesses are moving at a rapid pace**, and job seekers want control over their own records.

Digital delivery is **gaining traction.**



The emergence of blockchain technology in higher ed allows for **easier verification** and **eliminates credential tampering.**



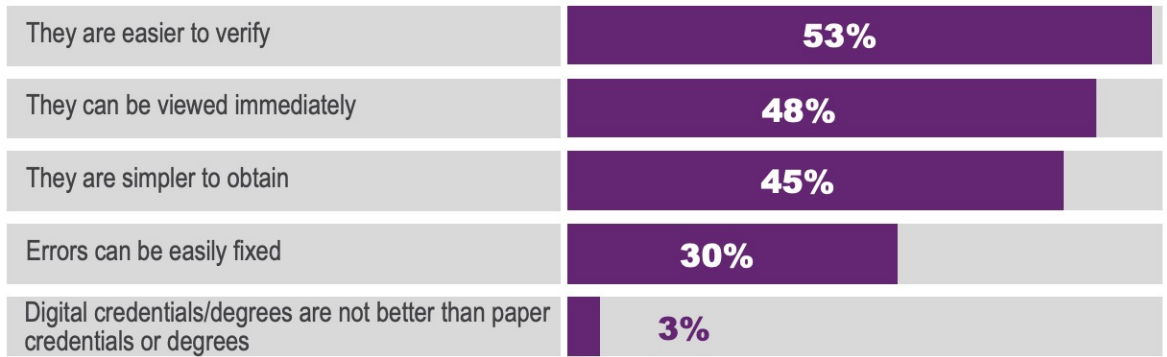
# The majority of recruiters **already trust** digital degrees or credentials



**52%**  
**of recruiters**  
are more likely to trust  
the digital delivery method



## Benefits of digital delivery



**58%**  
of students

**would trust a digital degree or credential** to demonstrate their qualifications for employment

# Implications



The modern workforce **requires new skills**, and recruiters are looking for talented candidates to fill those needs. No longer is the traditional degree the only learning that is expected in the workforce. Additionally, as machines advance to take on more task-based work, sustainable career paths will depend on a **mastery of soft skills**.



To stand out among their peers, students are arming themselves not just with standard degrees, but with **additional knowledge gained through credentialing programs**. These add-on skill sets demonstrate deeper specialization within their given fields, knowledge of best practices, readiness for promotion, and a host of other benefits within the workplace.



This presents an opportunity for institutions to become **centers of perpetual learning**—offering not just the traditional degree but also certifications and other learning opportunities, in accessible online formats, to keep students relevant and moving forward throughout their careers.





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