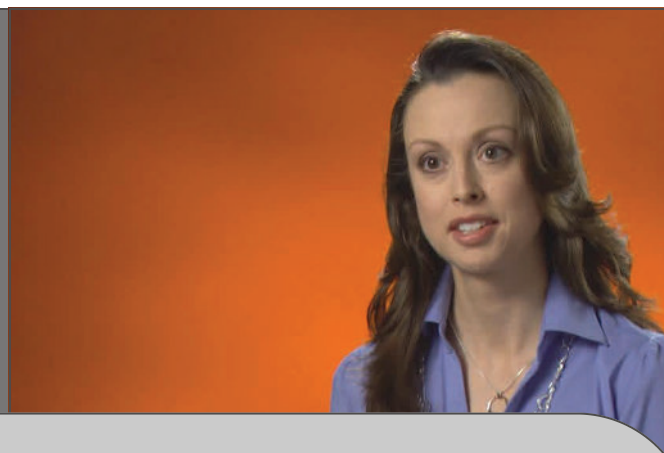# ASSESSMENT DESIGNER
SANDRA BARNES
HORIZON LEARNING ASSOCIATES

Key Functions

✳

Develops approaches and tools for evaluating and communicating learner performance across different settings in ways that are transparent and easily understood

✳

Helps learners move across formal and informal, on-the-job, and community-based learning experiences

✳

Helps remove barriers to innovation by creating performance-based assessments that work in new learning environments

✳

Uses techniques and strategies from diverse fields such as online gaming, design, and software to identify the best ways for students to show what they know and where they get stuck

✳

Enables informal learning and lifelong learning opportunities by providing ways to credential and communicate achievements in multiple contexts

My Job and My Work

I work for Horizon Learning Associates, which is an assessment design and consulting firm. We work with schools, non-profits, learning centers, industry associations, and some big companies to create portfolios of assessment methods. I work mostly in the informal education group, but some of my colleagues focus on formal learning environments, and others focus on the workplace and continuing education groups.

Right now I am working with a few clients who organize State and National Youth Challenges, like the big NASA Clean Energy Teen Challenge and the Metro Health Nutrition Challenge. These are pretty rigorous challenge competitions for teams of teenage and young adult learners who self-organize to find a coach, propose a strategy, and prototype a solution that addresses the challenge topic. Coaches are often learning journey mentors, community business leaders, or FabLab Directors who take ideas back to their main jobs.

For example, we're adapting a digital badging system specifically for the Clean Energy Teen Challenge. So, if you successfully form a team, get a commitment from a team coach, and submit a project action plan that is accepted by the challenge committee, you earn a team formation badge. The more you learn, the more you progress along the challenge. The more badges you collect, the more you show your depth and breadth of performance. The badges cover topics like Prototyping Levels I and II, Risk Taking, Public Communication, Water Cycle, Carbon Sequestration, Combustion, and Website Design. We're also working with the challenge organization's education team and with software designers to create a challenge-specific online space where participants can manage their badges and link them to their social network profiles. Many learning journey mentors recognize these kinds of challenges as useful ways to emphasize and contextualize certain disciplinary mindsets.

My Job and My Work (continued)

But we don't just focus on badging. We develop many forms of credentialing learning. We have a Performance Endorsement Network, a Learning Portfolio Review Collaborative, and some other experimental game-based assessments. We're also experimenting with how artificial intelligence software can be integrated into qualitative and immersive learning experiences to help make sophisticated real-time scoring more affordable and flexible.

How My Work Impacts the Rest of the Learning System

Our work has a huge impact on learning, both for young learners and for adults who want to change jobs or re-ignite their careers. Colleges and employers recognize our credentials. This is good because learners can pursue whatever path supports their learning needs. Our work has created a framework for describing and evaluating what people learn in all kinds of learning settings in a way that people can easily understand. If you look at a potential hire's digital portfolio and you see badges, you can click on any of them and read about the requirements of the badge, look into the history and reputation of the organization issuing the badge, and find a link to the work that was submitted to earn the badge. Someone doing unpaid work at a nonprofit or playing an online immersive game or competing in a challenge can demonstrate what they've learned — and it counts!

This kind of work has opened up many new learning opportunities for people who couldn't or didn't want to fit into the traditional formal system. It helped the old system transform into the rich set of experiences that today's learners have come to expect. Now, it's helping us realize our potential as a learning society.

My Biggest Challenges and Rewards

Keeping it simple and verifiable! We need to keep it simple so that learners, employers, and higher learning institutions are able to easily use and have confidence in our assessment tools. These are technical and business issues. I find this work very gratifying because it really supports career mobility and pride. Students are motivated to learn new things when they see a friend or someone they look up to display a badge.

My Most Important Tools

In order for assessments to work across contexts, like having a badge displayed in a learner's social network or digital presence, the assessment has to be developed using open source software. That way different agencies and groups can contribute to it. So open source software and the open source software communities continue to be very important to us. Our Open Assessment Software Community is like my second family!

Proudest Accomplishments

We've been able to form some fantastic relationships with key learning agents who are very vocal and public about creative assessment in general. At first we thought that the learning agents who had worked previously as traditional teachers, principals, or university administrators would fight this tooth and nail. But it turns out that they are just as interested in supporting flexible and diverse learning environments as we are. We worked really hard to develop these relationships, but it has paid off, and now they are some of our best allies.

KnowledgeWorks