# Transcript: Ep 144 - Excellence Awards w/ Chris Kline

*The following transcript is a verbatim account of the video or audio file accompanying this transcript.*

Speaker #1 (Narrator):

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Speaker #2 (Dave Huff):

Hey, folks. Dave Huff here with another episode of the IT Audio Series. Today with us is Chris Klein, who is the Senior Manager for Academic Authenticity and the Excellence Awards. What we're going to talk today about is WGU's Program to recognize excellent contributions, particularly in performance assessments. We'll talk about the Excellence Awards and Chris is the exact right person to be talking to. Chris, welcome. Thanks for taking time with us today.

Speaker #3 (Chris Kline):

Thank you for having me.

Speaker #2 (Dave Huff):

We're excited for that. Hey, Chris, tell us about the Excellence Awards. What is that program and what does it mean to WGU and to our students?

Speaker #3 (Chris Kline):

Sure. The Excellence Award Program is for non-capstone courses or non-culminating capstone tasks. What I mean by that is any program that has a performance assessment affords the student an opportunity to be awarded an Excellence Award for submitting high-quality work for evaluation by our evaluation faculty members. The program itself actually dates back to 2012, which is when it began. It's been around since then and it's a program that's growing. It's one that we're really excited about because it gives our students' opportunity to be recognized for submitting the work and putting the extra time and effort into that coursework that they're completing as they work towards their degrees.

Speaker #2 (Dave Huff):

Besides the recognition, what's the other benefit? I'm sure you guys have a lot of information on that.

Speaker #3 (Chris Kline):

There is a lot of benefits to the overall program. One of the things that we've done over the last several years was, there was some research that was done on the impact of the award. What it means to student persistence and the student completion, there was a content analysis done of 11,664 grateful responses. A grateful response is what a student sends back after they get the award, no student has to reply, but a lot of them do and within these grateful responses they tell us what the award meant to them. They might thank their course mentor, they thank the instructor, they thank the WGU's faculty member. They can say whatever they want. But one of the things we started to notice in these grateful responses is students were using keywords. They were saying things like thank you, or it really means a lot, or it made my day, or how encouraged they were that they got the award. But there was also another key element that we noted out of those 11,664 responses and that was that about 15.5 percent, so roughly 1800 of our students, either was about to quit or was about to give up until they got the award. The award themselves is a real important factor in allowing the student to persist onto completion within their overall program because of that motivational lift that's provided by receiving an award.

Speaker #2 (Dave Huff):

That's great. We always encourage students to do their best work. Not now, you mentioned this is an older program, but we recognize students for that work. Not only does that recognition feel great, but you're seeing that it actually changes the course of some of the students' journeys.

Speaker #3 (Chris Kline):

It does, and it's because of where the student might receive the award in their overall program as they go through. When you look at where they received the highest persistence flip, it's right around that four term mark. That's when they're getting into the nitty-gritty of their program as I like to call it. It's dragging on, they're moving forward with it, maybe making progress. But the coursework could also be getting a bit more difficult. All of a sudden they get that Excellence Award because of that quality work they submitted and then that persistence lift generally follows receiving that award.

Speaker #2 (Dave Huff):

Excellent. Hey, let me ask you to clarify one thing because you said this is for all performance assessments in non-cumulating capstone tasks. If a capstone, like many of ours do in IT, have multiple parts like a proposal and an after-action report, the student could actually earn an Excellence Award for Task 2 in our case, for the proposal, because it's non cumulating. It's not the final task of the capstone. Is that correct?

Speaker #3 (Chris Kline):

Absolutely. That is correct, yes. Even if you're in a capstone course and you have those multiple tasks, that will culminate in that capstone. But like you mentioned Task 2, for example, yes the student in Excellence Award on Task 2.

Speaker #2 (Dave Huff):

That's awesome. What do you recommend to students who are interested in earning one of these awards? What should they do?

Speaker #3 (Chris Kline):

They need to set that goal for themselves to actually make that a focus for their overall program. They want to get an excellence award because if they get it, then they're going to have the opportunity to receive either a PDF copy or an electronic copy of their awards. So they will actually have that physical award they can hold in their hand and do what they want with it, show it off, which we encourage them to do, but they need to set that goal. Once that goal is set, talk to the program mentor for that accountability focus to make sure that that goal is being met. Then engage with your course instructor on a regular basis. Double-check with them. You're going to be talking to them anyhow as you go through your courses, when you're looking at content, but now we're talking about you're getting ready to submit that assessment, talk to your course instructor about what you're submitting. Get their input on it to make sure that you are on track and that that work that you're submitting is really going to be top-notch work that will make the evaluation faculty member recognize this is solid work and it's worthy of an Excellence Award that the student has earned, so I'm going to give it to him.

Speaker #2 (Dave Huff):

That's fantastic. Set the goal and then share the goal with their mentors and with their instructors so that they're not on the journey by themselves. Chris, this has been fantastic. Thanks for taking the time to walk us through the Excellence Award Program. We're going to have you back for another episode to discuss specifically the Capstone Excellence Award. If you're listening to this and working on PAs, you've got the Capstone coming down the pipe. There's another episode that you'll find in the Capstone section of the IT Audio Series.

Speaker #3 (Chris Kline):

Thanks for having me.

Speaker #2 (Dave Huff):

Thank you so much and we'll be back folks. Thanks for listening. This is Dave Huff in the IT Audio Series.

Speaker #1 (Narrator):

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