

Usability Professionals Certification Investigations

Analysis of Survey on Attitudes Towards Certification

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Introduction

From April 18 – May 31, 2002, the Usability Professionals' Association sponsored a survey to collect feedback on attitudes and level of acceptance of a certification scheme for usability professionals. This survey was announced on a popular industry list, a discussion group of the STC Usability SIG and to all UPA members. The survey collected 975 responses.

One of the goals of this survey was to begin the process of collecting stakeholder feedback, starting with the usability community itself. Although this survey was not a randomly selected sample, the sheer volume of responses gives it weight in analyzing the attitudes within the community towards this effort.

Goals of this Analysis

The survey included a large number of questions with qualitative “free text” responses in an attempt to allow respondents to go beyond the questions and add their comments freely. The goal of this analysis is to look at the issues raised in the survey, identify common themes among the responses, and report on them as guidance to the UPA board and working group on what those responses reveal. We also looked for patterns among the responses that might provide insight into correlation between expressed attitudes and demographics.

We were specifically interested in the perceived barriers – hurdles that any scheme must overcome. The strength of support for certification and the relative acceptance of different approaches or elements of such a scheme were also of interest as we attempted to go beyond the numbers to understand the specifics that make this issue so contentious within the usability community.

Conclusions

There were some clear take-aways from our analysis of the data, summarized here:

Attitudes towards certification are ambivalent

- Overall, 58% of respondents are likely or very likely to see certification
- Neutral responses often have over a third of the total, suggesting that those who are unsure are the “silent majority” in this discussion.
- Those opposed to certification tend to be adamantly against it, however, as reflected in their comments.
- Neutral views and opposition existed in every sub-group of our respondents, but are a smaller proportion of those who are new to the field or not holding a degree in HCI or a closely related field.
- Support for a code of conduct was stronger than general support for certification, with 68% agreeing (strongly or somewhat) and only 8% disagreeing.

Governance and the content of any certification is a key issue

- Many comments expressed an attitude either explicitly or implicitly that certification is simply a way for consultants to make money.
- There is a lot of diversity of opinion on what a certification should consist of and how it should be assessed.

Specific Recommendations

Based on our analysis of this survey data, we have the following suggestions about specific actions that the UPA might want to take if it proceeds with this project.

1. Further fact-finding and analysis

- Analyze other stakeholder groups
This survey covers only one stakeholder group in depth – usability practitioners – although there are some other groups represented. Further work should be done with other stakeholders including managers of departments that include usability functions, product or corporate managers, members of closely related professions, teachers and leaders in academic programs, and (possibly) recent graduates.
- Collect international input
There were few respondents from outside of the US and UK. Feedback outside of this survey suggests that this was partly because it was circulated only in English, on English-language lists. If the UPA is serious about this being both international and supported by many organizations, there is an opportunity to ask national HCI organizations to create and circulate a version of this survey, or a new survey to follow up on issues uncovered during this initial investigation.
- Study other certifications
A comparative study of the various certification schemes that were mentioned in this survey should be undertaken to establish a baseline for the professional environment and the value of those certifications to those who hold them and other stakeholders

2. Address issues of governance and secrecy

- State positions publicly
There are many comments about fears that a certification will be imposed, or that the process is not open enough. Any further work should be accompanied by good communications of the work, opportunities to contribute or monitor progress, and regular reports to the community. Specifically, there should be a widely-distributed public report on the “official” UPA position (and an FAQ on what the project is...and is not!) shortly following the conference.
- Communicate goals
Find ways to clearly communicate governance, cost and organizational goals to clearly differentiate any work sponsored by the UPA from commercial certifications.

3. Next steps that could win wider support

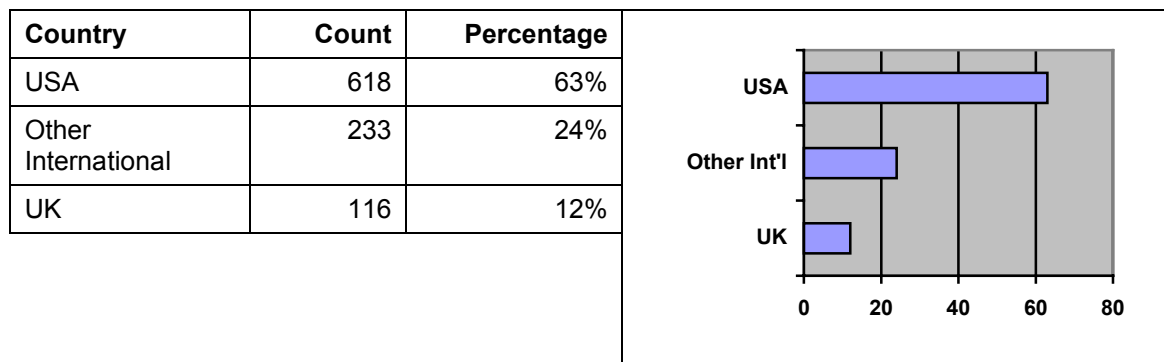
- Define curriculum
Attempt to define a curriculum (what should I study, either in an academic program or in alternate educational opportunities?)
- Focus on self-assessment
Create a self-assessment tool (where am I in relation to other professionals?)
- Identify target group for certification
Consider making the objective of a certification those moving from “New” to “Established” in their professional identify
- Create a Code of Conduct
There may be enough support for a code of conduct for usability professionals to warrant a project to create one under UPA auspices.

About the Respondents

Demographic Details

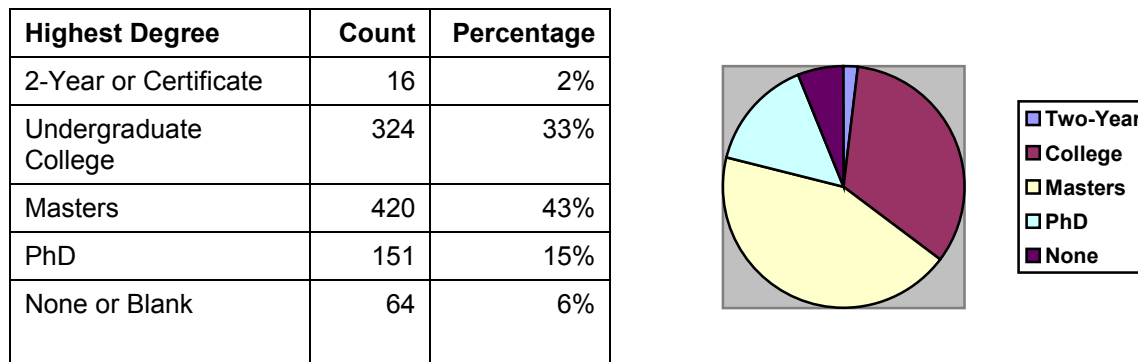
Country (Q1)

The respondents were overwhelmingly from the US, and most of the European entries were from the UK. We therefore do not think that any conclusions about differences in attitudes in different countries can be drawn from this data.



Degrees (Q5)

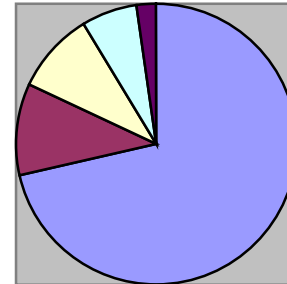
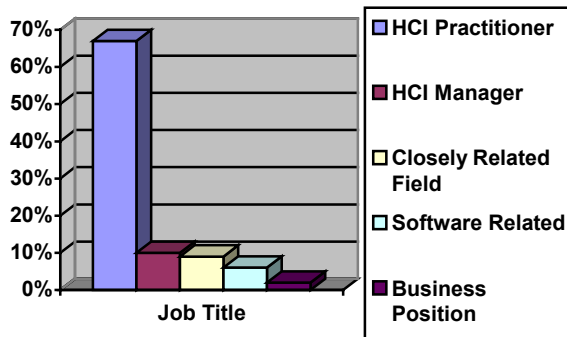
The question that asked what degrees the respondents held was done as free text. We normalized these responses looking for both the highest degree held and the field in which the degree was awarded. When there was an HCI-related field, it was given preference over a non-HCI field in coding.



Of the 731 entries with fields of studies (about 75% of the responses), the most popular were Psychology (all forms) – 18%, HCI or Human Factors – 13%, Computer Science or Information Technology – 10%. The rest of the entries were an impressively wide range of fields, from social science to literature, performing arts, MBA's and communications.

Job Title/Position (Q2)

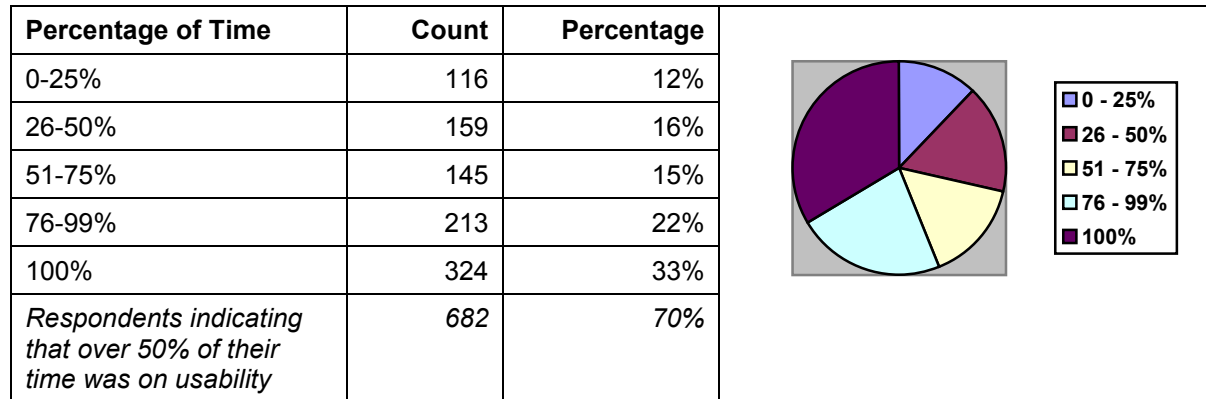
The respondents were solidly from the core UPA community, with 77% working as a practitioner or manager in a usability, HCI, or closely related field. Job titles that were entered by respondents were normalized to reduce the number of different titles, and then titles were grouped into five broad groups. The lists of titles included in each group are shown in the table below.



Current Position	Count	Percentage
Currently within the (broadly defined) field 1. Usability, HCI, or Human Factors practitioner 2. User Experience Consultant 3. Interface designer, interaction designer 4. Information architect	619	67%
Manager in usability, HCI or human factors	93	10%
Closely related fields 5. Content Manager 6. Graphic Designer 7. Industrial Designer 8. Instructional Designer 9. Marketing Manager 10. Market Researcher 11. Technical Writer 12. Trainer 13. Web Designer	85	9%
Software-related fields 14. Business Analyst 15. Manager in a Software Development Area 16. Programmer 17. Technical Analyst	57	6%
Academics	45	5%
Miscellaneous business titles 18. Business Consultant 19. Business executive 20. Manager, other	18	2%

Percentage of Time on Usability/HCI work (Q4)

Although we normalized this data, and it is interesting as part of a general portrait of the profession, this data was not used in any of our analyses. There was a lot of ambiguity in some of the responses, and indications that people decided how to answer this questions based on different reasoning (e.g., some indicated that they had eliminated ‘administrative time’ from their answer, while others took a simpler approach).

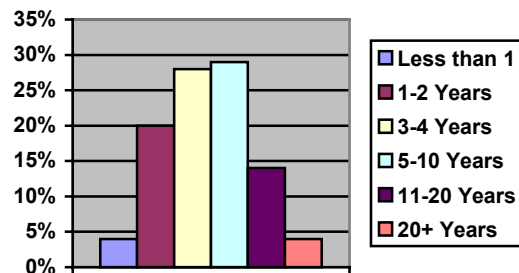


Years of Experience (Q3)

The curve of years of experience is slightly skewed towards less experience

Question 3: How long have you worked in the job role in the previous question (including time across employers)

Years of Experience	Count	Percentage
Less than 1 Year	42	4%
1-2 Years	196	20%
3-4 Years	269	28%
5-10 Years	279	29%
11-20 Years	137	14%
20+ Years	42	4%



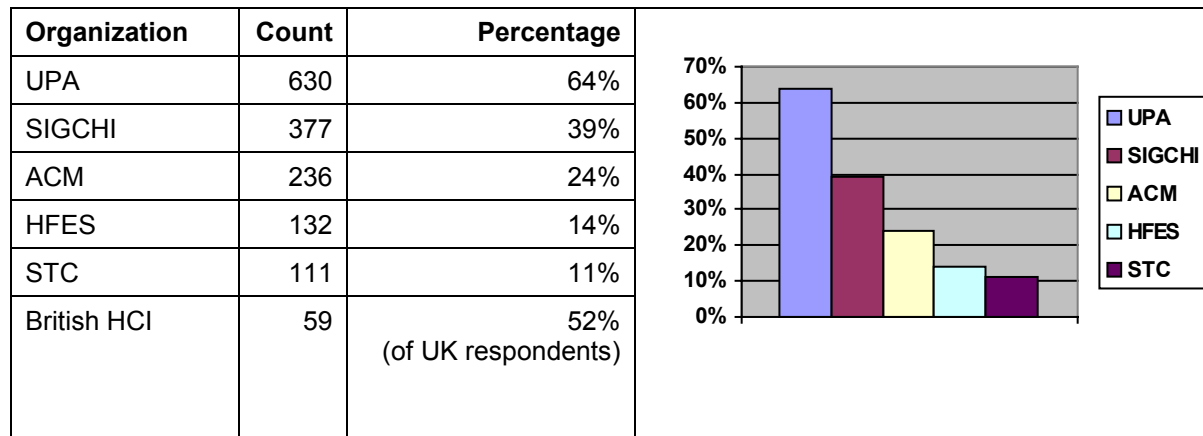
Certifications (Q7)

There were very few holders of any certifications. This may mean that there are simply few holders of these certifications, or that they were not included in our sample.

Certification	Count
CHFP (Certified Human Factors Professional through BCPE)	12
CPE (Certified Professional Ergonomist through BCPE)	10
AHFP (Associate Human Factor Professional through BCPE)	2
Miscellaneous other certifications, including: 1. Certified Usability Specialist (2) 2. Certified Interface Designer - Weinschenk (2) 3. Webmaster Certification (3) 4. PMP (Project Management Professional) (2)	30

UPA and Organizational Memberships (Q6)

Organizations that had over 3% representation of members among the respondents:



Other organizations mentioned, that might be of interest for further outreach efforts included the following, as well as specific mention of national organizations and psychology associations

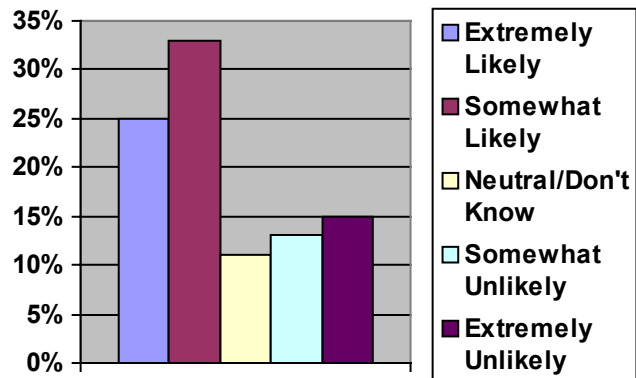
1. ALA (American Library Association)
2. HPEE (Human Performance in Extreme Environments)
3. MRS (Market Research Society)
4. SWE (Society of Women Engineers)
5. CPSR (Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility)
They have a Participatory Design Interest
6. NYNMA (New York New Media Association)
7. ASTD (American Society for Training and Development)
8. PACT (Professional Association of Computer Trainers)
9. ISPI (International Society for Performance Improvement)

Likelihood of Seeking Certification

One of the goals of this analysis was to see if there is any clear correlation between respondent demographics and interest in certification. Even looking at Question 20 (Likelihood to seek certification) alone does not provide an unambiguous interpretation of level of support for the concept because the wording of the question.

Overall, the responses to “Question 20 – How likely are you to seek certification?” are:

5 – Extremely Likely	25%
4 – Somewhat Likely	33%
3 – Neutral / Don't Know	11%
2 – Somewhat Unlikely	13%
1 – Extremely Unlikely	15%



Personas

Examination of the comments suggested to us that a combination of experience and level of education might give us more insight than looking at the two factors separately. In this our impression matched that of one of the outside analysts who said, “There doesn't seem to be single or groups of questions that represent attitude...but I would love to look at this more closely.”

We decided to create “personas” based on combining data from the education and experience, so that we could create a blended view of each of the respondents. To do this, we used two fields, assigned points for level of education or experience, and added them together. We then created cut-off points to produce roughly equal groups which we labeled. These personas were used for correlation with other fields.

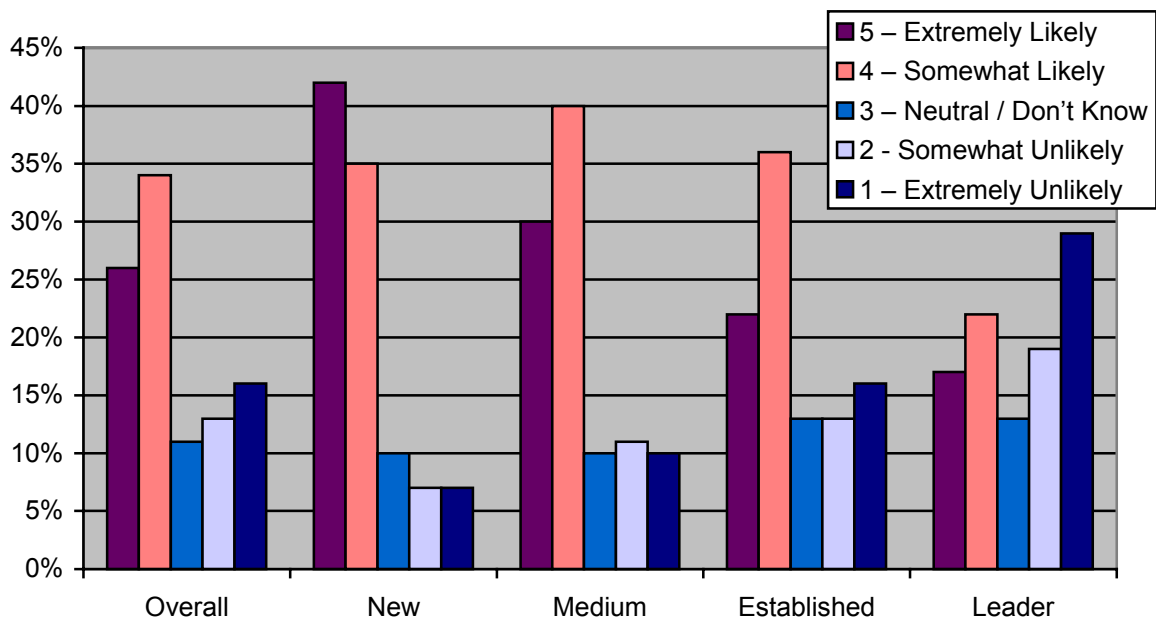
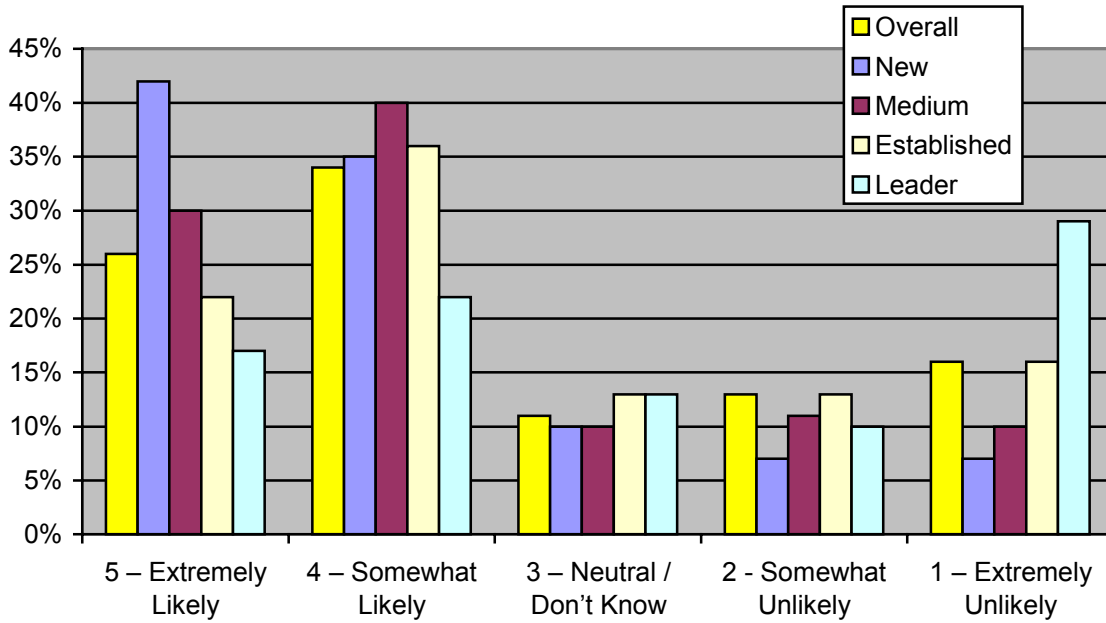
Persona	Point Range	Count
New to Field	1-5	105
Medium	6-9	324
Established	10-13	258
Leader	15-32	243
Not Coded	(blank)	45
Total		975

When these personas were compared to Q20 – Likely to Seek Certification the results were an accentuated variation. All of the tabulations in the details below are done by persona rather than individual demographics.

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leader
5 – Extremely Likely	26%	42%	30%	22%	17%
4 – Somewhat Likely	34%	35%	40%	36%	22%
3 – Neutral / Don't Know	11%	10%	10%	13%	13%
2 – Somewhat Unlikely	13%	7%	11%	13%	19%
1 – Extremely Unlikely	16%	7%	10%	16%	29%

This data is presented in the two charts below:

- In the first, grouped by answer, the answers of “5-Extremely Likely” and “1-Extremely Unlikely” show a preference towards seeking certification by New professionals and a disinclination by Leaders.
- In the second chart, the answers are grouped by persona, showing the relative strength of response for each of these groups.



The formulas for calculating the point ranges for the personas were:

Question	Answer Format	Coding
Question 3: How long have you worked in the job role selected in the previous question (including time across employers)?	Selection from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 1 year • 1-2 years • 3-4 years • 5-10 years • 11-20 years • Over 20 years 	Used the lowest number in the range to assign "experience points"
Question 5: What degrees do you hold? (Please spell out degrees that do not have a well-known acronym.)	Open-ended. Respondents listed degrees, and often included field of study	Coded responses to show highest degree <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None – 0 • Associates or Certificate – 2 • Undergrad – 4 • Masters – 7 • PhD - 12

We could go further and add elements such as whether someone is in a management position, works in HCI/Usability or a related field, and the percentage of their job that is directly related to usability. We did not do this for several reasons: it would make further analysis more complex by adding dimensions; it was not clear how to code these data elements; the answers to many of these questions were ambiguous; and, there was only so much time available. This might be an interesting area to pursue in working on stakeholder analysis, however.

Themes

Four of the questions look directly at the benefits and value of certification. In the first three questions, a series of statements was presented for assessment by the respondent, followed by a request for comments. The last was a stand-alone comment.

Question	Survey Text	# of Comments
Question 8/9	Several benefits have been proposed for a usability professional certification. Tell us how much you agree with the following statements. Please add any comments you have on the benefits of certification.	303
Question 10/11	Several downsides to certification have also been raised. Tell us how much you agree with the following statements. Please add any comments you have about the downsides of certification.	337
Question 14/15	For each of the following statements, indicate the value of usability certification to you. Please add any comments you have on the overall value of certification.	139
Question 29	Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?	288
		1067

We began by coding the responses to each of the questions separately. As we did so, it became clear that there was a great deal of overlap between the comments in these four questions. At that point, we combined them into a single list, and proceeded to group them into themes.

Although we started trying to categorize comments into those against or in favor of certification, in the end these themes combine both positive and negative comments. Often, comments on each side of an issue were very similar. Many combined both in a single comment or simply posed a question.

Several themes emerged from this analysis. Within these themes were several categories of comments, created in the original coding. These themes represent the key issues that any further work on certification must address.

There is a lot of overlap in the comments. Many of the same issues show up in several themes, and many include more than one point in a single comment. Where the overall comment included a point not made elsewhere, we coded the unique point. Where it reiterated points made in other comments, we coded the point that appeared to us to be most important to the respondent. Therefore, the 'number of comments' below is the *minimum* number of comments on this theme.

Theme	Description	# of Comments
Value to Customers	Opinions on the value of certification to organizations and other customers for usability services	40
Value in Hiring and Self-Promotion	Comments on the use of certification on resumes or in hiring/contracting situations	25
Value to the Profession	Comments on how certification might affect the standing of the profession	197
Value for Those Entering the Field	Comments on how certification would impact those entering the field	79
Defining the Field	Comments relating to problems with defining the field for the purposes of certification	138
The Certification Process	Comments on the process of certification and assessment of candidates	126
Education vs. Experience	Comments on all sides (and the middle) of the relative values of formal education and on-the-job experience	149
Opinions For and Against	Comments that reiterated the respondents position for or against certification	93
Project and Process	Comments on the conduct of this project, including advice on the survey and comments on UPA's involvement in this project	205
(not coded)	(duplicates, wildcards and volunteer offers)	15

Each of these themes is discussed below. Key issues in that theme are identified and some quotes from respondent comments included to support each of the issues. Answers to related questions, and cross-tabs are grouped with the themes.

Comments are quoted verbatim, with two exceptions:

1. Where a verbatim comment has been truncated, ellipses are added to indicate this
2. Simple spelling errors and typos have been corrected.

Theme: Value to Customers

Of the comments on concerns about the value of certification to customers, the strongest opinion was that customers – companies, managers and hiring agents – do not care about certification. Another group of comments also looked at the need for good promotion and a critical mass for success.

Looking at these comments reminded us that we've looked at the usability profession's views on the value to our customers - not at the *customers'* views, although there were some managers and others who hire. If we want to know more about the value of certification to customer-stakeholders, we need to do the research to ask them directly.

Question 14: Indicate the value of usability certification to you.

1. As part of a professional development plan used by organizations
2. To establish professional/pay level within organizations
3. To establish the credentials of usability vendors/consultants

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Valuable or extremely valuable	59%	68%	65%	62%	43%
Neutral	21%	17%	20%	20%	26%
Not at all, or not very valuable	20%	16%	16%	18%	31%

Question 8: Certification could help customers or clients understand the value of what they are getting

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Agree or Strongly Agree	44%	51%	47%	46%	36%
Neutral	22%	21%	23%	23%	20%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	31%	26%	29%	28%	42%

Question 8: Certification would reassure customers or clients that my firm or I know what we are doing

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Agree or Strongly Agree	58%	63%	63%	62%	47%
Neutral	18%	23%	19%	15%	19%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	21%	11%	16%	22%	31%

Question 10: Certification will just give a false sense of security to clients and customers

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	33%	53%	33%	31%	26%
Neutral	26%	24%	27%	30%	23%
Agree or Strongly Agree	39%	21%	39%	38%	47%

Question 10: Clients won't know or care about certification

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	31%	30%	34%	32%	27%
Neutral	29%	27%	33%	25%	30%
Agree or Strongly Agree	37%	39%	33%	40%	40%

Low value to managers

Many comments were from those who believe that managers and other customers don't care about certification, even when it has value to the individual.

- When STC considered certification, they surveyed managers and employers. Result: Managers and employers indicated that certification would NOT influence their hiring or promotion or salary decisions.
- Based on my experience, certification in production and inventory management, made me VASTLY better at my job than people who were NOT. But, the employer with an APPRECIATION of that certification is extremely rare...
- ...For the most part, individual clients may not care about certification. Lots of work in the IT world gets done by people who have minimal paper qualifications but who are excellent at what they do. Certification may help larger corporations and entities pass requirements that only certified professionals can obtain certain positions.

Value to consultants

This theme also included some comments on the greater value of a certification for consultants and consulting companies, as opposed to companies with an internal staff.

- Certification has little value to me as an in-house usability professional. If I were an external consultant, I might find value in it for selling my services.

Acceptance affects value

The value of certification depends heavily on how well-accepted it is. Several comments challenged the ability of a certification to create recognition for the field, or to promote usability or user-centered design to those who do not already believe in it

- The success of certification greatly depends on its acceptance by the business world in general. If a certification is unknown, or has backing of an unknown source in the business world it is meaningless. ...
- The benefits of certification depend on how wide-spread the certification becomes within our profession and how recognized it becomes outside of our profession. The former most likely will drive the latter. At this point I doubt it will gather sufficient momentum to be of any benefit.
- Certification will do nothing to communicate the need for companies to engage in user-centered design and testing.
- The idea that as a profession we would gain additional respectability, legitimacy or clout because we decided to certify ourselves is, I believe, untrue. This type of recognition from others (professional groups, clients or coworkers) comes from recognition that someone knows their area and does good work, far more than it comes from the designation of an outside body.

Theme: Value in Hiring and Self-Promotion

The flip side of the value to a company or manager is the value to individual professionals in presenting their credentials and in making hiring decisions. Although there were relatively few comments on this theme, they generally agreed that a certification would “look good on a resume” and might be an additional factor in hiring, though few thought it would be the most important factor.

Question 14: Indicate the value of usability certification to you

1. As a personal assessment of my skills
2. As a guide for personal development in becoming a more skilled professional
3. As part of a professional resume
4. To demonstrate the value of my work to clients/customers

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Valuable or extremely valuable	64%	78%	73%	66%	45%
Neutral	18%	10%	14%	20%	25%
Not at all, or not very valuable	18%	12%	13%	14%	30%

Question 8 – (Benefits) Certification would help me gain credibility within my company.

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Agree or Strongly Agree	42%	56%	51%	35%	29%
Neutral	18%	14%	19%	23%	13%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	41%	30%	30%	41%	59%

Question 8 – (Benefits) Certification would help me prove myself to potential employers.

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Agree or Strongly Agree	63%	77%	72%	62%	45%
Neutral	18%	9%	15%	19%	23%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	20%	14%	12%	19%	32%

Question 8: I would be more likely to hire or recommend someone who had certification.

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Agree or Strongly Agree	44%	55%	46%	44%	38%
Neutral	24%	21%	27%	24%	20%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	28%	16%	24%	29%	39%

Question 8: Certification would help me set hiring standards for usability professionals

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Agree or Strongly Agree	46%	55%	52%	45%	37%
Neutral	20%	15%	20%	21%	21%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	25%	19%	20%	27%	35%

Question 10: Certification is a waste of time because it still wouldn't stop people from doing sloppy work

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	22%	34%	22%	19%	23%
Neutral	24%	23%	29%	27%	16%
Agree or Strongly Agree	50%	40%	48%	53%	58%

Extra credentials

Comments on the value of certification in hiring tended to focus on it as an extra credential. In some cases, certification was also compared to degrees as an indicator of competency (more on this in its own theme later)

- Certification would be most useful when looking for employment or when hiring. I don't believe certification would give any kind of legitimacy to usability or spread the word - I think this will come with time as more developers (in particular) work with usability experts and see the value for themselves.
- Certification is a useful tool in gauging an individual's credibility if their actual abilities and competencies are unknown. This can definitely help a manager or client in their decision to hire an individual for a particular job.
- We have been hiring for usability positions recently. Several candidates have, in fact, passed university-level courses in usability, but clearly during the interview had little understanding of the principles. While certification could clear up some issues of knowledge, I would never rely strongly on it as evidence of professional understanding.
- ... If I see that a job applicant belong to STC, I am more likely to see them as a writing professional who works to keep abreast of developments in the field. Therefore, I am more likely to recommend that they be hired, as long as they are outstanding writers as well. That is the way I would see this certification. As one more piece of data upon which to evaluate a usability professional, not as the defining characteristic or qualification.

Comparing credentials

Other comments focused on certification as a way to compare credentials of different individuals or to add value or aid in lateral career moves.

- Would provide a career ladder for existing employees. Could be used by departments as part of a criteria for moving from a non-usability position into a usability position.
- I wouldn't mind having something else to tack on my resume, but I'm concerned that there is SO much disagreement over proper methods, and how to conduct those methods, even amongst professionals, that I'm wary of how accurate a validation test can be (and what bias it will have.)
- I think the biggest utility for certification is that it provides a way of comparing education and experience of usability professionals.

Low value for academics

A dissenting voice came from a few academics, who saw little value for themselves.

- As an academic its benefit is not that apparent, apart from giving me credibility with students. Unfortunately I probably will not get it because I have insufficient experience.

Theme: Value of Certification to the Profession

There were many comments on both sides of this theme. Some felt that certification is a critical step in gaining legitimacy and recognition, while others felt - often strongly - that there was a strong danger of damage to the profession by premature codification of standards or in the divisive nature of the debate.

A few comments felt that certification is *less* prestigious than not being certified, based on their perception of other IT or software certifications.

(reorder table)

Question 14: Indicate the value of usability certification to you.

1. To promote professional excellence within the field
2. To help organizations understand the value of UCD and usability

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Valuable or extremely valuable	54%	69%	60%	54%	41%
Neutral	22%	15%	20%	22%	25%
Not at all, or not very valuable	21%	13%	18%	21%	30%

Question 8: Fewer people would try to pass themselves off as usability professionals if they had to be certified¹

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Agree or Strongly Agree	51%	53%	52%	58%	45%
Neutral	22%	26%	25%	19%	19%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	24%	18%	21%	23%	33%

Question 8: If the field were certified, the usability profession would gain legitimacy with people in other fields

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Agree or Strongly Agree	44%	54%	50%	40%	34%
Neutral	26%	23%	25%	30%	26%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	28%	20%	23%	29%	39%

Question 8: If the field were certified, the usability profession would have more clout in spreading awareness of the field

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Agree or Strongly Agree	37%	47%	40%	36%	28%
Neutral	29%	29%	32%	27%	29%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	32%	23%	27%	36%	42%

¹ Some of our respondents told us that they objected strongly to seeing this statement in our survey. We apologise if anyone found it offensive .

Builds legitimacy and credibility

On the positive side, there were many who felt that certification could build legitimacy and credibility.

- It is useful in selling the profession to the business world only primarily if it is kept simple and straightforward.
- Anything that adds to the acceptance and legitimacy of our profession is a good thing. It's just too easy for traditional companies (software) to think that usability is fluff...
- I work with a lot of highly educated engineers who value certification. I think that in less academically oriented environments certification will be less beneficial, but not detrimental.
- Certification can help build credibility if your clients have some understanding of usability and value usability tenets to some degree.
- I think anything that adds legitimacy to our field is a good thing. There are so many people who don't understand it at all... makes it easy for the HF person to be tossed out in hard economic times (like I was... which is why I'm back in technical writing again).
- ... It would also aid in gaining respect, validity and solidly defining the profession of usability.
- Legitimacy and clout are hard to quantify. Even with the certification, the usability professional would have to work hard to gain those, especially clout.
- I would use certification also to set me apart from related disciplines (design, marketing) in my company. Usability is easily hijacked. This also that I would expect the certification to differentiate between these professions (ie an excellent designer is not necessarily a good usability engineer)
- Certification will help HCI and usability be seen as a profession in its own right rather than something a designer or technical staff may dabble with between there normal job.

Raise standards in profession

On a related note, there were some who felt it could set or raise standards in the profession.

- Yes, certification could help define the qualifications of a set of professionals, but it takes a significant amount of time to create and maintain awareness of this status or level of expertise.
- I believe certification will set a standard of excellence but should be flexible enough to encompass more than those professionals who only perform usability testing as their primary role. One thought is that maybe there are several 'flavors' of usability certification.
- Here in Italy we have may 'usability experts' who have never study anything about usability... I think certification will help real usability professionals to defend usability principles.
- What seems to be MISSING from this list and from the benefits list above is that it establishes a baseline or level sets the usability field. that seems to be one of the greatest values (assumption underneath is that the test itself is a decent assessment process).
- ..The value addition will be in maintaining a common ground, common set of principles and standards. Again not in competing with each other but complementing each others work.

No guarantee of quality

Some cautioned that certification is no guarantee of quality, and that we could be setting ourselves up for problems. Some felt that it would have value in keeping out the unqualified...or that certification would be a back door for those with marginal qualifications to “sneak in”

- I feel the weeding out process would be the best benefit. Usability cannot risk becoming similar to nebulous terms such as 'web designer.'
- Purely from the point of view of usability, certification is dandy--it gives a yes/no response to the question of whether someone is REALLY a 'usability professional'.

- I am VERY wary of Usability certification. Many people already in the field of usability / human factors are unqualified, and they might be the ones deciding on certification practices. Any type of certification that did not require an advanced degree in social sciences and experimental design would be bogus. This could serve to legitimize those already in the field that don't belong.
- I am afraid that many people who have little or no experience would apply for certification and not really be able to do the work. There are a bunch of other reasons against it, many of them political.
- Although some may argue that certification may lead to better 'quality control', I also see a risk that unqualified people could just take a 'Certification for Dummies' type of course to get their certification, which undermines the necessity to gain knowledge from formal training and education programs.
- If it is like project manager certification, I have worked with many people who have the certification, sometimes several, but they are horrible to work with and don't seem to grasp elements of project management that I (a non-project manager) can do well. The point, certification doesn't always mean anything, other than the fact that someone has passed an exam.
- The value is not there unless a certification includes having a professional degree and a 2 to 3 year re-certification. The true value of being an HCI designer, usability engineer, or human factors specialist does not come from a certification, but comes from stringently doing human-machine interaction research and applying to their discipline what is learned from the research. A certification will not stop the usability witch doctors from practicing and preaching voodoo. ... Although certification is not the entire solution, it is an appropriate step to organizing the discipline. Thank you and Good Luck.
- Considering the state of our discipline we should be concentrating on the positives not the negatives. Every governing body that offers certification is susceptible to misrepresentation, sloppy work, etc. ...The real challenge is create a certification process that is comprehensive, fair and reflective of our field.

No value or benefit

There were many comments that expressed the opinion that there was either no value or no benefit to a certification.

- Certification does not add value. It is only an indicator of current knowledge (and not insight, capability or performance).
- Certification would be adding another layer of bureaucracy to my job...
- Certification will not change the way I work for the better or make any other guarantees that anyone I hire will be that much more qualified or do a better job than without certification.
- At this point I don't see it being of value. If I was to spend the \$ I would use it on a credited academic program than on a UPA based certification that means little to my clients.
- Currently this adds little value to me and I'm highly suspicious of the process. One of our most important skills as usability professionals is our empathy and people skills. You will find many people who test well...but that doesn't give you a true sense of their skill as a usability practitioner.

Potentially harmful or divisive

Question 10: Certification is a waste of time. We should work on other things that matter more

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	43%	63%	48%	40%	33%
Neutral	26%	20%	27%	32%	23%
Agree or Strongly Agree	28%	15%	25%	27%	41%

Others felt it was potentially harmful and divisive to the profession distracting us from more important activities.

- I worry about this interest in certification - I believe time and effort is being dedicated toward it when it could more profitably be spent in research and raising awareness of our discipline. This is a self-serving proposition and one I couldn't support.
- Certification will not make usability more desirable, more trusted, more accepted, or more valid. Only people continuing to share the gospel of good design, and proving users do things more easily with a better design, will do that. We must show our financial value to the bottom line - then when we are credible, certification may matter on top of that.
- There is legitimate and intelligent disagreement among usability specialists regarding methods and best practices. 2) It will set us to arguing amongst ourselves even more than we already do! 3) It gets us to focus even more on ourselves than we already do... we need to understand the needs of businesses and users!
- I've yet to see a certification program proposed that will not 'getto-ize' or 'balkanize' our field. The arguments above are shortsighted and suffer from turf-based myopia.
- Don't do it. You're hurting our community. The polarization and ill-will this has already generated can't be justified by the likely outcomes. We should be working together to solve the ROI problem, or to 'certify' products of companies. That's where the problem exists; it's not with *us*.

Theme: Value for Those Entering the Field

Comments related to the impact of certification to those entering the field were in three groups. The largest feared that it would create a barrier to entry, while a smaller number felt it would help those seeking to enter the field by establishing criteria. There was also a group that felt its most important value was in self-assessment and establishing standards.

Question 10: Someone who is qualified might not “pass the test” for certification

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	24%	23%	22%	29%	20%
Neutral	27%	33%	26%	26%	28%
Agree or Strongly Agree	46%	39%	52%	43%	46%

Barrier to entry

Many felt certification could be a barrier to entry, especially if it became required for those doing work in usability.

- It might be seen as a barrier to entry to the field. Lack of certification could result in loss of income for some practitioners. I would have concerns that the requirements for certification might not adequately measure one's actual competence - there would need to be accommodation for varied and diverse experiences and education.
- What is the problem that we are trying to solve through certification? If it is incompetence, then certification may reduce it some but certainly it will never eliminate it. The biggest downside is that it might raise barriers to people who want to enter the field and don't have easy access to formal education. [How many of the people who are considered experts today would be in the field if they had to be certified first?]
- It must be taken into consideration not to block people to grow up as usability professionals in the countries where usability engineering has not well developed.
- Certification is an elitist proposition. ... Certification would make it easier to stratify the field and promotes in-fighting in a profession that has difficulty in presenting itself as a viable investment in any product development. I've seen the divisiveness that can happen among so-called usability professionals that occurs right down the formal education vs. real-life experience lines.
- Will certification include only 'Professionals', and thus not include those working toward becoming professionals? If so, what impact would 'not being a professional' potentially have on that persons career/professional standing etc...? If 80% of your work is in usability/HCI, what are you if you are not a recognized professional, and what support would there be from the certification/professionals body for such people being recognized?
- Many in the usability field with a human factors education tend to treat users as their exclusive domain rather than educate and include the client or design team during the process. Certification may lead to a further chasm between the haves and have nots (i.e., we are qualified to interact with users but you are not).
- ...It seems that some people have a knack for what they do and may not have the knack for being tested. I really hate seeing people like that left out in the cold because of certification.
- Certification carries the risk of marginalizing the profession like Human Factors (or engineering) because you can only do it from within one field. By defining a fixed set of criteria that define a usability specialist, then many capable people won't qualify and anybody who qualifies is relegated to only a usability role within an organization... I don't fully identify with the usability community because of this.

Alternate route to establish credentials

Others felt it would help those entering the field by providing standards and allowing them to establish credentials.

- I 'accidentally' ended up in usability and have gone back and taken multiple graduate level courses in human factors, HCI and the like. Being certified would help legitimize my belonging in the field.
- Could be beneficial to those of us doing the job.... I have registered as a part-time PhD student in order to achieve an academic qualification relating to my usability research. Once I have my PhD ... Certification could be useful for those who have no opportunity to get an academic qualification.
- ... I think Usability Certification should be geared toward people who have been doing usability work already (like a tech writer). Usability Certification wouldn't be good for somebody who's brand new to the field. I still think the whiners on Utest should open their mind a bit, though. :-)
- I think it would be more helpful to people starting out. My fifteen years of experience speaks a lot stronger than any certification.
- There are Usability professionals out there that don't have a Psych or HF degree, such as Tech Writers. Certification would give them the opportunity to learn the standards, plus have more clout in the workplace.

Value is in self-assessment

A group of comments expressed the value of a certification in terms of self-assessment and planning professional development.

- As much as I'm all for certification, it's more of a personal achievement for me then anything else. ...
- I believe it would have more of a personal impact than a professional impact. It could be used to help identify personal developmental needs. As we all know, we need to customize our approaches based on the needs of the organization. Therefore, a standardized certification may mean more to one organization than another.
- I would be useful to have and would give me more confidence that I am achieving accepted standard for usability practitioners.
- I think it will provide the most benefit on an individual level. It will help you to sell yourself and add to your resume. However, it's not going to convince organizations of the value of usability any more than having a degree does.
- It would be good as a way to see where I compare with what others think is important. I may not change anything I'm doing, but it's interesting to know.
- I think certification adds more validity to the field and to us as usability practitioners, but I mainly see this as a bench mark for use within the field. I do not expect clients to seek out only usability professionals who have the certification or most employers to only hire usability professions who have the certification.

Must not be too easy

A small group felt that it was critical that the certification not be too easy – that it be tough to pass – or it would have little value. Some of these comments seem directed at commercial certifications such as Weinshenk and HCI.

- The certification process would have to be rigorous. The candidate would have to demonstrate advanced usability knowledge, not just pay for and attend a certain number of classes.

Theme: Defining the Field

These comments surround the underlying need to define the field, and the problems in doing so. Many of the opinions express a strong ambivalence about certification, whether they ultimately are in favor or not. The comments also express a great deal of fear that this effort could be harmful, overlapping with similar comments in the Value to the Profession theme.

Question 19: What should the scope of a usability certification be (please check all that you think should be included).		
1. Understanding and applying a user-centered design process	848	87%
2. Identifying and analyzing user needs	841	86%
3. Defining the context in which the system will be used	712	73%
4. Conducting usability evaluations	827	85%
5. Proposing design solutions	705	72%
6. Interface design	579	59%
Other (written in/grouped)		
7. Research skills	13	< 1%
8. Software development	11	< 1%
9. Design prototyping	10	< 1%
10. Evangelism or ROI	9	< 1%
11. Information architecture	8	< 1%
12. Cognitive psychology or human factors	7	< 1%

Note: Percentages show number of respondents including this scope item

Despite – or perhaps complementing comments that the field is too broad for a single certification, a majority of responses indicated that either 5 or 6 (all) of the suggested items should be included in the scope of a certification.

How many scope items were selected		Count	% of Respondents
• 6		448	46%
• 5	The missing item was most likely to be: UI design, Propose design solutions, or Define the context of use	144	15%
• 3		60	6%
• 2		18	2%
• 1	The single item was most likely to be: Understand and apply a UCD process or Conduct usability evaluations	17	2%
• None	Many of these people also commented that they were declining to answer and thought certification a bad idea	88	9%

Need to define core skills

A large group of comments express the opinion that defining a set of core skills or curriculum is the most important issue. There were also related comments about tilting the curriculum towards psychology, rather than graphical design.

- I do think certification is a good idea, but a formal well designed curriculum must be established for those that want to obtain certification. Note, certification does not necessarily legitimize the field. I have noticed in some fields that certification only meant that a person passed a test. Experience plays a role as well.
- The main benefit I see would be to help clarify the basic practices that we should follow. It might also help with personal training plans.
- Although certifying professionals is important, it is equally (if not more) important that the criteria for certification is known and understood by everyone (both in and out of the usability field).

Field too undefined at this point

Some felt that the field was too young, and unformed, to be codified in a certification.

- Usability and UI design are broad fields with no clear boundaries with other disciplines. Certification means narrowing the field to something that is 'certifiable'... it's too early to limit ourselves in this way. Lets be inclusive rather than try to build a fortress...
- My strongest benefit to clients as a usability professional is my research expertise -- I don't believe that certification is applicable to something that involves intuition and perception and analytical abilities. Anyone can read a textbook and become 'certified' by spitting out the right answers. In addition, many UCD 'principles' and 'methods' are not scientifically proven to be the most effective techniques to foster UCD. ... Certification feels like an attempt to legitimize these methods without rigorous study of their efficacy.
- Certification required someone to demonstrate competency within a defined body of work. What body of work does the usability profession have? We have a handful of what are considered definitive works, and half of those disagree with each other. Who is going to be the lucky group that gets to define what is right for me and my customers? Usability is a infant profession at this point, much like psychology was in the 1800's. There is just not enough work or consensus along any topics to be certified in it. ...
- This proposition scares me. I don't want there to be standards set by which only a few are qualified or will be accepted. I don't want to have further fight some entity/organization, etc. in order to be recognized as a usability professional. It is bad enough that there are common misunderstandings about this practice...
- I approve of certification in general. But for usability, the whole idea is premature. In the current unformed state of the usability disciplines, it would certainly be used politically by groups eager to advance their own interpretation of the meaning of 'usability.' Such a political process cannot have any broad credibility. A certification that will be universally ignored is worse than none at all.
- This is a political minefield! I predict that after much furor and hoopla, the idea will be dropped as unworkable and much disillusionment will result. At the very least, this concept is premature and needs to wait until our discipline has matured a bit more. I believe there are more useful ways we could be spending our time such as facilitated discussion forums.

Could restrict creativity

Another – and surprisingly large – group commented on fears that a certification would restrict creativity in both developing the field and in doing the work.

- In my field (education) the true benefits of usability work come when usability is universally recognized as something to strive for. Pragmatics rather than blue-sky development or research are the general rule, we can't afford the luxury of too specialized an approach. The richness of the field comes in part from the diverse background of practitioners and I would not wish to see usability work homogenized.

- In my opinion, the field is evolving too quickly for certification to be a useful mechanism to evaluate competence. Too often, those who believe they 'know' the manner in which to solve problems miss crucial and exciting opportunities to innovate and change along with the ever-evolving medium of the Web. ...
- It has kind of a stigma to it. When I think certification I think techie and when I think HCI I think Human. Somehow the idea of certification to me means learning a trade, where a degree is focussed more on education. The field of HCI can have a classical education feel to it - requiring analysis and understanding of the human experience. I guess certification lessens the perceived value and loses something - Like a 'canned' version of the profession which does not consider the art involved. Too weird??
- Like the ISO-9000 certifications the certification just ensure that you make the same mistakes over and over again
- I basically oppose any type of standardization in area where the strength should be the ability to analyze and understand each phenomenon by it's own premises; but I recognize, that a 'soft' certification might help clarify the differences inside the field to outsiders - and thus help create an overview. SO question is: Certification of WHAT - people, services, quality, usability ...
- The biggest problem I face is getting the development team to allow me to help with the UI design. When we call ourselves 'usability' people, then they call on us only when they think they have a problem. ... Usability testing is not effective for impacting the UI design.

Field too broad

Another large group of comments were that the field was too broad for a single certification, requiring either specialty certifications or only a basic core set of competencies.

- Usability is such a soft field it's hard to prove anything. And many people will still think it's unnecessary, even with certification. We would actually do better promoting our field in ways other than certification first.
- The key issue would be the body of knowledge and skills that would be required for certification. Seems like the backgrounds of most UPA folks are very wide ranging.
- May be very difficult to reach consensus on how to define 'usability professional' so that it makes sense in every company. For example, at the UPA conferences, there is very little discussion on usability professionals doing more than just testing. However, at my company, if we just tested and did not provide suggested solutions to usability problems seen in those tests, our perceived value would be greatly diminished.
- You'd have to define what it meant to be a usability professional. (Designer or not.) Many designer wouldn't be interested, perhaps including myself. I'm a member of UPA, but 'usability' isn't how I define myself to clients. I'm an interaction designer who relies heavily on a well developed usability methods tool kit to DESIGN. ...
- A single level or type of certification may not be appropriate. Someone that is a pure genius as an interface designer should be able to receive some kind of certification in that, however, they will not likely have testing experience or knowledge...(this is just one example, Usability is probably too big a field to have a generalized certificate that is suppose to cover everything, I would not hire a jack of all trades, I need people that are very good at a relatively few usability related activities and capabilities). ...
- I'm replying to this survey as a new member of UPA, which apparently encompasses a wide variety of usability professionals -- I am only interested in Web-centered usability, however, as we do not design software, hardware, furniture, etc. I do not plan on getting a full-time job in usability. However, I would be interested in a program that could certify expertise in AREAS of usability, or in a program that could provide certificates based on continuing education courses, experience, interviews, etc. for a particular usability area.
- I think it would be beneficial to have some type of certification and also suggest that maybe it should be organised in levels. For instance, someone who has been working in the field for many years

would be able to gain a level 4 certification and someone who is just starting their career could gain a level 1. Then it would be possible to progress and climb a 'development ladder' within your career. ...

- I saw no reference to levels of certification. It would seem that there could be value to levels such as usability technician (able to conduct usability testing, etc.) vs. user interaction designer. These take different, though complementary skill sets. Requiring everyone to be good at everything, or dumbing down the certification to admit all, would make the certification nearly worthless.
- I think your certification process should be broken up into chunks. At the end of each major course you take your test and when you accomplish all four you get your certificate. Like college - you take each course take a test on move on to the subject. taking 4 courses over the course of 2 years and trying to remember all you learned to me is asking a lot when most of us are professionals with careers as well.

Theme: The Certification Process

Comments on the certification process are widely varied, in part because this survey was not accompanied by a specific proposal. This theme focuses on issues in the certification process that were of most concern to respondents – there is a separate section later on the problems in responding to an abstract concept. The “downsides” questions show a strong concern about costs and relative benefits.

Costs

Question 10: It may be too expensive for some people

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	15%	10%	14%	16%	19%
Neutral	31%	30%	28%	34%	34%
Agree or Strongly Agree	50%	55%	56%	48%	43%

Question 10: It will cost me more without adding enough benefit

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	28%	37%	32%	26%	20%
Neutral	34%	35%	35%	37%	29%
Agree or Strongly Agree	35%	25%	31%	35%	47%

Question 27: What is the maximum that you would pay to be certified (in US\$)?

Note: This table covers the 751 responses to this field. It does not include answers for annual costs, or the 6 comments that they would pay only in local currencies

	All
Nothing	10%
Under \$50	3%
\$50 to \$100	6%
\$100 to \$200	23%
\$200 - \$500	18%
\$500 - \$1000	13%
\$1000 - \$2000	7%
\$2000 - \$10,000	6%
Don't Know	11%

Question 28: If you were certified, who would most likely pay for your certification?

	All
1 - Myself	48%
2 – My Employer	36%
3 – Don't Know or N/A	16%

Cost, and fears that certification would be expensive, dominate comments in this theme.

- I have had my BCPE since 1993, and I pay \$100 per year (expensive!), and don't see much benefit at all. I only keep it up as an 'insurance policy' in case I might need it when looking for a job or trying to win a consulting contract.
- ... I don't think candidates should be priced out of the market just because they don't work for a big/rich company.
- My own organization's members (not-for-profit org) regularly debate this issue...expense is always an issue unless the certifying body can point to the certification as actually impacting job acquisition, tenure, etc.
- I paid thousands of dollars for my doctorate; I have no intention of paying more money for a certification scam.
- It may be too expensive, pricing would definitely be an issue. I think it would also make it harder for people to get into the industry (and believe me, it's pretty hard already!)
- Regarding the fee, I would hope the costs would be primarily nominal, to cover expenses and materials. I worry that if it's too expensive, it would be available only to the 'wealthy,' and undermine the original intent.
- The cost will be a big issue. People may already be paying up to \$500 a year to belong to professional societies in order to stay on top of the field. Perhaps you can get a discount on society dues if you are certified?
- Certification could be looked at like a semester of grad school, in terms of costs. People who are serious about this should not balk at investing major resources into their certification. I doubt we could have a good certification program if it only cost a couple hundred bucks.
- If it makes people incur significant costs in time and/or money who really already have ample evidence of their skills and qualifications, then it could be extremely irritating. It should be designed to be cheap and quick for people who already have the skills and knowledge, and a helpful guide to what skills and knowledge you still need to acquire for those who do not yet have them.
- ... Most certification programs are just too expensive to even consider taking and they take too long to complete. Employers will not pay for certification training as they do with degree programs.
- I think certification can be a good thing, so much depends on how it is achieved and recertification to make sure your skills are being kept up-to-date. It must be inexpensive enough for independent contractors, small businesses, individuals whose companies will not pay for certifications, etc. to be fair to everyone who practices in this field. If it is priced too high, you will do the field a disservice by only making the certification available to high-paid professionals and companies with deep pockets.

International Recognition

There is little difference between the US, UK and other countries in their opinion of the importance that the certification be international. Comments on this issue tended to be from outside of the US, and to focus on worries that the scheme would be too US-centric, inconvenient or difficult if not offered locally, or that it would be too expensive if charged for in US dollars.

Question 18: How important is it that the certification scheme be agreed on and recognized internationally?

	All	US	UK	International
Very Important	32%	33%	29%	30%
Important	37%	36%	38%	41%
Neutral	17%	17%	17%	16%
Not Important	8%	9%	7%	5%
Very Unimportant	3%	3%	3%	3%

International recognition of the certification is addressed by a small group of comments

- International acceptance of the certification is a difficult topic. I think regional certification would be appropriate and a higher level for international concerns should be available. If training were required for certification, likely my employer would pay. I would likely pay for any certification tests.
- I worry that this whole thing will end up being US centric which is no use for many of us living in the rest of the world.
- I think certification is a great idea and it must be recognized internationally so it's important to get input on the process from a variety of professional organizations.
- If a series of courses was required then it would be important to offer them in Canada so the expense would not be prohibitive. Allowance should be made for courses already taken through other affiliations.

Code of Conduct

Comments on Code of Conduct ranged from:

Adamantly against

- This is a crazy idea. Can't say enough how much I dislike this idea!
- What do you mean Code of Conduct? This isn't the Marines.

Through worries about what it was and how it might be policed:

- Might standards support the lowest common denominator?
- as a non-native English speaker, I don't quite understand 'Code of Conduct'
- How would it be enforced? On what penalty? How would the code be decided?

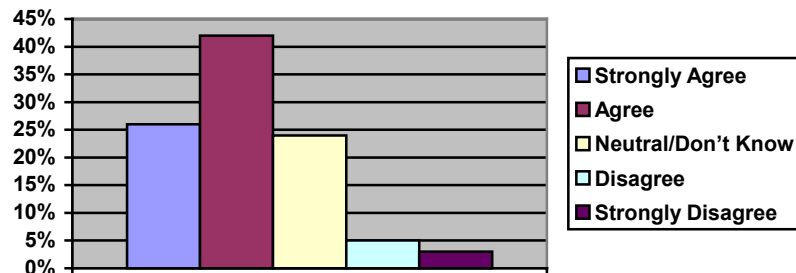
Through strong support:

- This is worthwhile, whereas the 'certification' putsch is not.
- Perhaps the single most important aspect of any certification program

There was a much more consistent pattern of agreement with the idea of a code of conduct, and less opposition than is seen elsewhere in the survey.

Question 16: A professional Code of Conduct should be included as part of a certification program.

	All
Strongly Agree	26%
Agree	42%
Neutral/Don't Know	24%
Disagree	5%
Strongly Disagree	3%



Process and Related Issues

Question 10: I'm not comfortable with a certification procedure because I never discuss my work because of confidentiality or competition

	All
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	46%
Neutral	25%
Agree or Strongly Agree	17%

Comments focused on the requirements and process, often worrying that it might become a burden or be a problem for those with confidential work in their portfolio.

- Most of my work is confidential and can't be shown to outsiders. ...
- Would be valuable in theory, but I worry it would be an unnecessary burden on trained, practicing or qualified usability engineers. ...
- Lots of the above depend on the content/standard of the certification - it should be accessible to all (ie not expensive, or geographically constrained etc...)
- I have a great deal of trouble imagining what an assessment would be like for certification - I doubt anyone would agree on it - I don't do GUI interfaces currently - I evaluate speech interfaces. I may not always use classic usability techniques, yet I'm in charge of training all our company designers in usability methods - and they produce results
- They should have some sort of grandfather clause for experienced folks to be able to test out of this, or just make it explicitly focused on the usability testing aspect and NOTHING else. ...
- Certification is only the start, to ensure that certification is maintained there needs to be a process of Continuous Professional Development. We work in a fast moving field and we don't want to create a certification which means that people who use out of date knowledge are given the same credence as people who are aware of the latest thinking.
- I have already been certified and I'm in a 'leading' position in my country. I do think that people like me would not seek to be certified once more.

Finally, there were a small group of comments on the concept of certifying a process or product rather than the individual practitioners.

- ... I think that we need a process/product certification. This last would leverage our position in the field much more than a simple professional certification.
- Focus on certifying school programs, not practicing professionals. I see some value in certifying that schools are teaching students appropriate courses with up-to-date methods, since hiring beginners is much riskier than hiring people whose track record you can evaluate.
- Certification of training programs would be of value, I think, NOT 'certifying the field.'

Theme: Education vs. Experience

An overwhelming number of comments in this theme relate to the opinion that experience is more important than educational credentials. There were, however, a strong minority of comments that a degree should matter more. Others believe that any certification should be created in close association with a degree program or curriculum

Question 10: I already have a related degree in the field. Why should I bother with certification

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	35%	48%	37%	32%	30%
Neutral	17%	13%	20%	16%	13%
Agree or Strongly Agree	33%	14%	27%	43%	44%

Question 10: Certification doesn't take my real-world experience into account

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	20%	29%	15%	25%	20%
Neutral	23%	21%	24%	20%	25%
Agree or Strongly Agree	53%	45%	58%	54%	51%

Question 10: It would be better just to have a curriculum or identified areas of study

	All	New	Medium	Established	Leaders
Disagree or Strongly Disagree	32%	39%	30%	35%	29%
Neutral	32%	31%	36%	31%	30%
Agree or Strongly Agree	32%	26%	32%	33%	36%

Need links between certification and degree programs

Comments on the relationship between certification and degree programs suggested some association or linkage.

- Certification would allow professionals with practical usability experience a way to gain credit for that experience--and also to identify and fill any individual gaps via professional development workshops or courses. It is a wonderful alternative for those who have the experience but who may not have the time/resources to commit to a full-time graduate program. The standards should be set high, so certification has the same prestige as an academic degree related to usability. (Note: I would not expect those with graduate-level usability degrees to require certification; their degrees would be sufficient and certification would be an option.)
- The downsides of certification disappear if one considers it as an alternative path for those who have significant practical experiences but not a formal usability degree. If those with usability degrees consider certification as an option rather than a requirement, then most of the 'downside' statements above would no longer apply.
- I would like certification to provide both professional direction and training for my employees. I'd pay for quality courses if they were comparable to other educational courses in cost, and for certification if the cost seemed to reflect the actual expenses of administration and were not enriching the coffers of the certifiers.

Degrees more important than certification or experience

There were some that expressed the opinion that degrees are more important than experience...

- I believe William C. Howell conveyed my sentiments about this best in his 2001 Presidential Address to the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society: 'Would we scrap the excellent programs that now train folks in HF/E? Of course not. But we wouldn't waste our energy and theirs on some futile accreditation effort. We'd let the educators decide how to train them and the market decide which programs produced the most useful talent. Instead of dictating, we'd facilitate - helping educators and students track the market and vice versa; and promoting information exchange among our many disciplinary constituencies. We'd continue to do surveys. And we'd publish educational guidelines (not requirements) - not just for HF/E programs but for courses at all levels in all sorts of programs, from kindergarten to the doctorate to adult education. ...
- ... Over the past few years, there seems to be this attitude in the profession that anyone should be allowed to join the ranks if they want to without pursuing a college degree. After all, all you need is a 'passion' for building better designed, more usable products and the rest can be learned from whatever book is being touted on UTEST, conference seminars, or a one week class offered by a consulting firm. Quite frankly, this is ridiculous. There are few professions operating in the world of high tech that do not require the practitioners to have a formal education of some sort. My employer wouldn't even consider interviewing an electrical, software, mechanical or any other type of engineer who did not possess academic credentials. Why is usability/HF/HCI any different? I suppose I suffer from a bias that what we do is most definitely a field of engineering. ...
- Why would I spend 6 years getting a degree and then put weight behind a certificate? There are yahoo's in this field, and certification isn't going to change this. Potential employers don't know enough about UCD/Usability never mind know about a certificate that they should ask for. Those professionals who have a certificate will offer it those who don't won't, and I don't see it making any difference.

Experience more important than degrees

But, the vast majority of comments on this theme support the idea that work experience is the most important.

- Certification would force practicing usability professionals, most of whom already have an advanced degree in a related field and years of experience, to waste time and money to 'prove' that they can do the work they have been doing successfully for years. Personally, I feel that I have paid my dues and am very against certification. Certification, much like standardized testing, only lines the pockets of those doing the certifying, and does not prove that one can or cannot do the work.
- The longer I do UI design, the more I believe that good design, depends largely on domain knowledge. Someone who knows the domain of healthcare admin will not necessarily be a good designer for data warehouses. Both domains are enormously complex and take years to learn. I have trouble imagining how you could possibly design a valid test for a good designer. Perhaps you could design a very general test that would test trivial things? But I don't believe you could get at the factors most important to good design.
- I would prefer that certification does not depend upon having a high degree in academia. I have found that my experience in this field has allowed me to be quite competitive, but I wouldn't be able to compete if certification requires a high degree. I worked with several highly degreed human factors professionals at IBM, and that is where I feel I've learned the major basics of this practice. Experience and attending conferences and classes has also added to my expertise.
- I've known a number of individuals across fields who are able to obtain certification and still do not understand their field. They simply test well. Certification is an elitist agenda which will more serve the rich white men over other races and sex in already outbalanced scholastic and employment environments. A person's work should speak well enough for them. Additionally adding certification

will create an institutionalized discipline which will hurt the field by causing it to move more slowly through voting and procedure than the technology for which it must remain cutting edge.

- I already know how to value my own and others knowledge and experience and so does my employer. We look into what background and education people have as well as their previous work experience. I don't see a need for a certification. On the other hand, I believe it might be too narrow minded. It's hard to find a common description for this field. There are so many different (and still good) ways of doing this.
- Having had a number of new graduates (from HCI/ergonomics degrees) working for me, I think it is essential that certification distinguishes between those people who have recently read all the right books and attended the lectures, and those who have been working in the field and coming up with real solutions for all the problems where there are not text-book solutions (i.e. most of them). ...
- Practice is more important than theory
- Certification certainly cannot *replace* on-the-job experience, but it should be viewed as a valuable adjunct to knowledge and expertise gained 'in the trenches.' Perhaps a minimum number of years in the industry should be a prerequisite to final certification (an apprenticeship, as it were)?
- ...I think certification would be more valuable in our field were it to indicate more than a baseline level of achievement, e.g. provide basic/intermediate/expert levels of certification. ...
- What you have accomplished and what you can offer count more than certification. I work with many Human Factors professionals and none of them are certified. Degrees and background count for more when I consider hiring someone. When working with non Human factors folks its the ideas and what you find out in testing that impress them. None of these folks would know if I was certified or not.
- Certifying usability practitioners is like certifying technical writers, i.e. it doesn't change anything. Both are hired for their ability on the job, which they have to prove before they are hired. The certification would be a nice thing to have, but I don't think it would influence me to hire someone, nor would it influence an employer to hire me.
- My resume and portfolio says more that any certificate will ever say.
- Certification is a minimal level - not a guide to excellence. It is the entrance requirement to play the game - not a strategy for contributing to the team. It could benefit the marginal consultants because their clients would believe they were qualified. (Whenever I want an example of a poor website I always go to a consulting company website.) My employer and my customers do not care about my degrees or certification. They care about results, benefits to the organization and to the individual users.
- The idea of certification just bothers me. I really do not see any value other than that for a personal measure. The results I produce sell themselves and I am not shy about promoting usability within my own company. What I have managed to accomplish and the passion I feel about the field seem to have been enough so far to more than amply persuade others within my organization that usability is a valid and important aspect of the software development lifecycle. It has not been an easy process and is ongoing, but frankly certification would not make any difference in this process. If somebody does not know what usability is, it just isn't going to matter whether you are certified in it or not, they still do not know what it is and it is up to you to explain it, give examples, and sell them on it as a concept.
- I've never been one to go for credentials. I've always preferred experience. But I wouldn't mind have a credential to show for all the interdisciplinary knowledge and skills I've amassed. I'm giving a paper at a conference in Atlanta this summer and they asked me if I can any kind of certification to add to my name and title, and it got me thinking.
- Personally, I am not really interested in certification. At present, I have had all of the formal education I plan on having and now am interested in increasing my practical knowledge -- real world experience. I really do not want to take more time of to 'get certified' just as a way to 'prove my value'. For myself, then, I see certification as an inconvenience and an additional expense. However, for someone who has not yet gone through the academic experience, or who has not yet had the opportunity to gain work experience certification may prove beneficial. Therefore, I believe

that if certification is put into the process that it not be mandatory, but rather used as a stepping-stone and an additional qualification, taken in consideration of the individual's overall qualifications.

- I've done mental workload analysis and design of interfaces down to 1/100ths of a second throughout multi-hour flight missions. I did eye tracking research 20 years ago...how will you evaluate this background against a programmer who has read a couple of Jacob's books and has tried it out on a couple of projects?

Theme: Opinions For and Against Certification

This group of comments collects a group of simple statements in favor of, or opposing, certification.

Statements opposed to certification

- Obviously, I'm dead-set against the idea. The world doesn't need another set of standardized tests. Instead, encourage apprenticeships, internships, dissemination of best practices, and adoption of useful and up-to-date courses for continuing education.
- ...I think it is an absolute dud of an idea, impossible to administer and police. Give it a big miss.
- Forget about standardisation and certification. Times changes - always. Standards don't.
- I think we've already lost this battle. Customers don't know and don't care whether we're certified because they have been brainwashed by 'branding' people and think usability is something that the marketing department will ensure.
- I would view this as a necessary evil, not as an opportunity
- It's a stupid idea, touted by a bunch of self-serving consultants who are hoping to scam a few bucks. What makes me good at my job are how I use my brain and my education to adapt usability methods to work effectively within my organization. Exactly how is certification going to measure that? Answer: it won't. What it will do is create a false standard that will simply waste practitioners time and distort clients understanding of the value of usability work. At worst, it could pressure practitioners to do unnecessary or ineffective work simply so they are conforming to what is inappropriately regarded as 'industry standard.' Usability work isn't brain surgery. Only a few people can do it really well, true, but plenty of people can do a good-enough job...
- Don't do this. Any 'usability certificate' that you offer will have no more weight than a few community college courses, and will be just a mechanism to transfer money from the young people of this profession into the pockets of the UPA and the 'trainers'.
- I have misgivings about the ability to certify that a usability practitioner can perform in the real world (as opposed to on tests or in interviews, or...). Portfolio reviews are infeasible sources of meaningful input both because many work products are proprietary and because it is impossible to determine with certainty each individual's contribution to a result...
- Americans are obsessed with certifications. Health care workers (nurses, doctors) are certified once in Europe, but every year/every other year in U.S.

Statements in favor of certification

- Certification is desperately needed in the Usability field.
- Although I do not have formal qualifications at degree level, I would jump at the chance of gaining accreditation. I hope that the accreditation is open to all levels of educated people.
- If certification can be had in the absence of a standard academic degree, I feel it would appropriately acknowledge the value of practice, experience, independent study, and applied theory. I think the certification should indicate ability as well as academic standing.
- Good idea. Problematic implementation. We need to focus attention on demonstrating ROI and the value of usability and UCD to our clients/employers.
- I'd like to see some action instead of paralysis by analysis. Its better to have one and then improve it then to have none and miss the window. Because this IS a window!
- Make this happen! It needs to be done by an objective and internationally recognized group. HF1's recent efforts are a little suspect given that they're in the business of selling the very training needed to pass their certification program.

Theme: Project and Process

There were a large number of comments that offered opinions and advice on the survey, the project as a whole, and UPA's involvement in certification.

Question 20: If a usability certification program is implemented, who should govern it

	All
Independent consortium	45%
Don't Know	23%
UPA	21%
Other or blank	11%

Don't compete with existing schemes

A scattered group of comments expressed concern that any certification for usability professionals not compete with existing schemes.

- You missed a key question which, for me, makes the rest of the questions superfluous: 'While I agree that certification is important, separate usability certification would be a waste of effort and, potentially a dangerous distraction to non-practitioners: certification for usability practitioners is already adequately handled by BCPE.'
- ... Don't believe a new certification process is necessary, when a recognized one is already in place.
- Other than certifying that an individual is competent to perform usability testing, I'm not sure what usability certification would provide that BCPE certification does not.
- If the BCPE process does not fully address the perceived needs of UPA, then they should be engaged on the matter before an entire separate certification process is contemplated.
- In the UK membership of professional bodies (eg BCS) is controlled unlike in USA where it is just paying that gets you in. Hence UK does not need this scheme. Also, in UK/Europe it must be related to CEng/EurEng certification.
- Certification can have a positive affect but mean little to others. It takes time to establish the credibility of a certification process. To my mind, the PE (professional engineer) has the credibility. The CPE is still looking for respect... Case in point: this survey is looking at establishing a new certification in the same general field... If that is the case, it must be because there is something lacking in the CPE certification.
- UPA should work together with BCPE. Don't need multiple certification agencies. That would just cause confusion and perhaps weaken both.
- If you compare the Project Management Institute certification process, almost all large companies have some sort of internal or external training course that leads to PM certification. Certification and other PMI processes all center on the 'Body of Knowledge', which I feel is the most important part of certification--since there are very different opinions from inside and outside the field a set of standards gives people something concrete to understand.
- I was a technical writer question tester for the Princeton testing company that does the SATs, etc. Two years ago they were working on developing a certification for technical writers. The hundreds of questions they sent me to evaluate were poorly written, irrelevant to the field, verbose, confusing, and frankly, worthless for developing or proving technical writing skills. My concern with this usability certification is that it would develop the same kinds of questions that would supposedly 'prove' that someone understood and could be a usability professional.

Don't emulate existing certifications

Other comments on existing schemes hoped that this one would not emulate them.

- Currently, Human Factors International is offering certification of some sort. I find their certification to be questionable for several reasons. My top-two are... 1. They are a for-profit organization 2. Their certification does not seem to be recognized by any independent, professional org (HFES, UPA, etc.) All in all, their certification looks like an agenda to make money and increase their own visibility rather than the visibility of the profession. I guess my point is...certification should be done by independent, not-for-profit organizations to be credible.
- I hope this discussion does not divide the usability community. I'm paying HFI a lot of money for their certification. I hope it is not a waste of my time or my precious money.

Governance and control

Many were concerned about governance, and most wanted it to be non-profit and cross-organizational

- Certification scheme for usability professionals must thoroughly be debated by business practitioners (not academic professionals) and be accredited by national accreditation bodies. Moreover, the scheme must be designed to give benefit to market and industry involved in the usability field and not to those who had already invested their time and resources until today.
- Ask: who will decide who the 'reigning board' will be? How will they be elected and what is their tenure? There is too much to be decided before any real answers can be given. My gut reaction is that this will be a test that won't show competency, but book learning. And my employers will want to see past success rather than a cert from an organization that might be a mail-order company as far as they would know.
- CONTROL AHHHHHHHHH!! who is controlling who and why do they want to! Worried about the running of this. Who is doing it and for whose benefit? Just a concern at the moment! Tell me more. I missed the meetings and mails on it. Was more interested in information on other areas. Though, after this survey I will look into it more.
- To be effective, the certification program needs to be a well rounded, credible, affordable program to attract interest from many different industries.
- An unenforceable certification is of no use. It will be bureaucratic, plus what will be the curriculum content? Also will cert invalidate the short courses done by companies on user centred and customer centred design?
- If there is a move towards certification, I'd prefer to see an objective group like UPA providing it. Certification by a consulting group is offensive to me. However, with the increase in academic programs I'd rather see a person with a degree rather than certification. Also, certification will mean little to non-usability people.
- If the certification is from a neutral party, like the ACM, that's one thing. If its from a for-profit consulting group, then that's something else.
- As I said, I see very little value in the certification you seem to be proposing. For designers, any certification 'test' is meaningless because you can't test design skills. For human factors professionals, I would only trust certification from the HFES or the ACM that had very stringent standards, and different levels that take years of experience and publishing to traverse.

UPA's involvement in this project

Question 22: How important is the involvement of the UPA (Usability Professionals' Association) in **developing, administering and conducting** usability professional certification?

	All Responses	UPA Members
Very Important	20%	21%
Important	39%	38%
Neutral/Don't Know	29%	30%
Not important	5%	5%
Very Unimportant	4%	3%

Comments on this question included the following. Note that these have been selected for diversity of opinion and as a sample of thoughtfully stated comments.

- Not being a member and not knowing how widespread and accepted or otherwise the UPA is, I can't really comment. This is the first time I have even heard of the UPA.
- If there is a certification program, UPA must be involved.
- If UPA isn't involved, then it isn't THE usability professionals association.
- It is important but I think it is also important that *****ALL***** chapters of the UPA participate
- A body concerned with the welfare of their members should also play a big part in their professional evolution.
- A nationally recognized usability organization must govern certification testing to demonstrate to upper-management in corporations that such a program is worth the investment in time and money. It also will more likely provide the leadership and focus needed to grow and sustain the effort. And, the UPA organization represents a more realistic cross-culture of individuals engaged in usability activities.
- I see the UPA as a politically neutral organization in the matter of certification. It has as its goal the improvement of the interfaces we deal with every day and I think would inculcate high standards in the process of certification. My concern about a group that included business stakeholders is that the process would become politicized which might, over time, erode the standard in favor of expediency.
- I think UPA should definitely be involved in developing the certification process, but should NOT be involved in administering or conducting the actual tests.
- As one of the major professional organizations, the UPA is very important in governing this. I feel the UPA has a strong component of real-world experience (as opposed to academics) to give perspective to governance.
- Having been in these discussions in the HFES, I know that it is best that certification, if done, NOT be perceived as a way for a professional group (such as UPA) to declare turf and make money.
- I do not want the UPA to tie its identity and money to an issue which is controversial and likely to be scorned by other larger and more influential organizations such as CHI and HFES
- I think that usability professional certification is a big mistake and could hurt many in the field. I personally would cancel my membership in the UPA and would advise others that I know in the field to also boycott the UPA if the UPA went down this path. I pay dues to the UPA so that it can help me as a usability professional and promote the field of usability--not so that it can force me to go through an arduous certification process. The UPA should not be the police of usability.

- I think that involvement of a non-profit professional organization is extremely important so that a broad range of practitioners of usability have a role in deciding how they will be certified. It is important that the organization be impartial and non-profit.
- Although I think that the universities are the one that should be responsible for the certification, I'd like to add the practitioner side to be represented and taken into account.
- As long as a major academic or prof. association is involved it is less likely to be biased. ACM involvement would also be good.
- Certification must not be seen as a profit driven enterprise, and I believe UPA would be in the best position to maintain that. I would never, ever seek certification from an organization that offers (expensive) courses to help me pass their test. Their incentive would be for me to fail on first attempt. If UPA were to certify training courses, they would have to be in a position to gain absolutely nothing from course enrollment. Otherwise, I would look at the whole thing as a sham.
- Credibility should come from one organization. If you try to involve multiple organizations it will take years to agree on the requirements. UPA is the most sensible choice.
- If there is going to be certification then the UPA should help develop it to make sure it has practical and not just academic merit.

The UPA needs to generate a reputation it does not yet have before it can play a credible role in an certification process. At the moment it just looks as though the UPA is trying to limit entry into the market to limit competition. We should concentrate on creating a significant market and discipline before we worry too much about regulating it.

- There are so many certifications out there. A usability certification must be backed by a highly visible and credible international organization, and this can only be the UPA, in my opinion.
- This might be too large for UPA to tackle without buy-in from other groups. However, this is exactly the kind of issue UPA should be involved in deciding. For UPA not to be involved would undermine the credibility and the value of the organization.
- UPA adds value to the community by providing avenues for communication, not by setting rules for what makes an 'adequate' or 'certified' professional. I would hope that the organization would recognize that, because of the range of practices employed and methods used, certification is a ridiculous idea.
- UPA has a great start toward being a balanced central organization. With more demand for practical and marketable solutions, and less for academic or research oriented skills, UPA is perfectly positioned to lead the campaign towards establishing a certification body and in working with other organizations to co-ordinate this effort
- UPA has a key role to play. I would be concerned that other professional organizations may not focus on user-centered design.
- UPA has too narrow a focus and is too immature an organization to be helpful or credible. Would like to see whoever administers this certificate having strong research background, rather than a community of people who are applying rules and regs unquestioningly.
- All relevant organisations, e.g. UPA, Ergonomics society, other international bodies, should be consulted to gain agreement and acceptance of the certification (process).
- UPA should be involved, but it has too narrow a scope. The term usability usually doesn't include all of the issues in #19. Actually, #19 is the heart of the debate over the definition of human factors/usability/interaction design/ interface design/ information architect, etc. What does it mean to practice one of these fields?
- ACM/SIGCHI has traditionally been the professional organization associated with user centered design and usability 3. UPA seems too narrowly focused on the evaluation and measurement aspects (as an analogy, there's a lot more to being a psychologist than administering clinical tests).
- As a key association for usability professionals, I can't see how a certification process could be put into action without involvement by UPA and other related professional organizations.
- Because the organisation that manages the process needs to be able to assess the relevancy of people's expertise (one could argue that the BCS HCI Group could do this -- in reality it is probably

best achieved through a consortia of these bodies) -- once the framework has been agreed of course ;-)

- As a recognized group concerned with usability, I think UPA should be involved, but not necessarily own the certification.
- Depends upon the degree of opening towards internationalization. E.g. today UPA is almost unknown throughout Germany (Europe?). Therefore it would be of most minimal importance in this part of the world.
- Have never found the UPA especially relevant to my work and don't see how that would change. Don't think they are a large enough or well enough know body to make a difference to the credibility of certification.
- I would expect UPA to play a large role, but I also see room for other organizations to contribute where UPA may fall short. For example, HFES seems like they would be able to make a nice contribution where UPA might not have as much expertise.

These comments from other questions were all 'messages' to the UPA board from other questions:

- Thanks for sending out the survey. It's nice that the UPA is practicing what its members preach - gather user data!
- If there is an ongoing discussion among UPA leadership regarding certification, it would be nice to broaden that discussion to the general membership via an email discussion list.
- It is important that the certifying body be an independent non-profit group and that it be recognized in some way by the major professional societies representing the discipline.
- Any legitimacy would depend on how the certification was conducted and which organization conducted it. Potential clients/customers would only be reassured if the organization had some name recognition or reputation in industry ...
- ... I am sad to see that the UPA is even involved in this topic. UPA should maintain a distance from this type of thing. Remain neutral! Support all HCI practitioners regardless of their degrees.
- This is definitely a UPA sponsored event. UPA was started by unqualified people and now it wants to legitimize itself and de-legitimize others. Does this make me an outlier for the survey?
- To reiterate, if UPA does this alone, then it's not worth it to me. I don't want to have to be certified by all the professional societies separately to be a member of the Human Factors community. I believe this should be agreed upon by all the major Human Factors professional societies. That's why I don't have a certification from HFES - having one from them wouldn't guarantee me this certification from UPA, nor from CHI, etc. Don't make my life more difficult, please.
- I don't think certification is the key role for the UPA, although IF certification becomes a reality, the UPA should be involved in some way. I prefer to see the UPA as a champion of current best practices, spreading the word to the uninformed (of whom there are many).
- It would be excellent if the UPA could include the administration of the exam at the start of each conference. My employer would pay for that, and it would be great if local chapters could have 'Test preparation' meetings to get everyone geared up to take the test.
- I am against usability certification. The UPA should spend its resources (and my dues) working for its members, not against them--which is what requiring certification would amount to.
- I just feel the fox is already in the chicken coop and running the show. The people who started UPA were not qualified. HOW can that organization now assume to judge other people unqualified. A little hypocritical if you ask me.

Comments on the Survey

Advice on the survey was predictably mostly negative (that is, because those are the comments people bothered to write), although there was some praise. The strongest sentiment was that the survey was biased in favor of certification and made it difficult to express a negative opinion.

- Your questions are extremely tight and misleading. My concern is that the pursuit of certification is strongest amongst academics who want to find an even debating platform with their colleagues from other fields. Like developers, journalists, film editors, marketing specialists etc. certification is not a requirement of practice nor proof of ability - it shows commitment to the discipline and the ability to read books and transfer it to an exam paper!
- I did not think this survey was constructed well. It seemed biased towards those that are for certification without giving much opportunity to those who are opposed to it to give directed, thoughtful feedback concerning particular areas.
- The design elements of this form don't follow some principles for information display. The big, dark bars at each question do not encode much information, but they are very salient in relation to the layout. ...
- This survey should be held outside the usability community. If the outside world doesn't need a certification program at this moment it should not be implemented. It is very well possible that in the future the need for such a program could emerge but as long as there is no external demand it has little of no value.
- There are certainly some caveats. The certification should be designed in a useful, usable and user-centred way itself. This is clearly happening as evidenced by this questionnaire!

A large group of people said that they had difficulty answering the survey because of the lack of a concrete proposal to respond to.

- At present I have not seen any specific certification proposal that has any benefit; all I have reviewed so far deeply flawed. A proper informed discussion within the community may reach a consensus on what is 'good practice' and I would welcome that.
- I think this survey would have been easier to take had you first defined what type of certification you meant, and how pervasive or necessary you hoped it would become.
- Again, it all depends on the quality of the specific certification. It could range from very helpful and positive for the field and practitioners to a damaging, expensive, and politically motivated 'hoop' that people are required to jump through (after having bought a ticket) to 'join the club'. (Hopefully it will be the former!)
- Value of certification would vary depending on its quality. It simply should not benefit specific group out of entire usability societies.
- I find it very hard to comment on this in the abstract. One would need to see a proposed scheme. If the content was right and the governance mechanism was such as to be credible this could be a good idea.
- I'd have to see how well the certification testing checked whether applicants can apply principles to applications in the field. I've found knowledge and application to be quite far apart. Application can also be very specific for certain audiences.
- I guess I would need more information about what certification would involve. I have seen certification in some areas that is just an excuse for vendors to charge lots and lots of money to train for the test and the certification has to be continually renewed. Seems like it's more of a money making scheme than a useful professional tool.
- My biggest concern is that the certification will be set up by academics who are detached from the realities of doing real UI work. I know practitioner representatives are involved but I believe these to be un-typical of the people they claim to represent, often having highly academic jobs in commercial usability organisations...

Text of UP Certification Survey

This survey seeks feedback on professional certification for usability practitioners.

The survey is jointly sponsored by

- An international working group that is exploring the feasibility of certification , to be operated by an independent non-profit consortium of usability organizations and firms
- The UPA (Usability Professionals' Association)

Your answers to the following questions will provide important input for this group and for the UPA.

The approach being considered by the working group would assess a candidate's competency to select and apply appropriate user-centered design (UCD) methods (based on ISO 13407). It would not stipulate which specific methods should be used. The goal of certification would be to enable practitioners from diverse backgrounds to become certified, by emphasizing demonstrated expertise rather than only educational qualifications.

The international working group and UPA will use the data from this survey to help decide whether to continue with this approach to certification, and if so what form it should take.

Please complete this survey if you work in a field related to usability or if you teach, manage, or purchase usability-related services.

This survey has 29 questions organized in the following 4 sections:

1. Please tell us about yourself
2. Opinions about certification
3. Governance
4. Costs

The survey does not ask for any personal data such as name or contact information, and all replies will be confidential.

It takes about 10-15 minutes to complete. Your feedback is very important and we appreciate your time.

Please tell us about yourself

Help us understand who you are and what you do.

1. In what country do you work (or are primarily based)?

1. Australia
2. Canada
3. Denmark
4. Germany
5. Italy
6. Japan
7. Sweden
8. UK
9. USA
- Other: _____

2. Of the following options, which one best describes what you do in your current, primary position:

1. Usability, HCI, or Human Factors practitioner

2. Interface designer, interaction designer
3. Web designer
4. Industrial designer
5. Information architect
6. Technical writer
7. Academic
8. Manager, usability, HCI, or HF practitioners
9. Manager, within a software development area
10. Manager, marketing and/or communications
11. Manager, other
12. Business executive
13. Business Analyst
14. Technical Analyst
15. Trainer
16. Graphic designer
17. Programmer
18. Market Researcher
- Other _____

3. How long have you worked in the job role selected in the previous question (including time across employers)?

1. Less than 1 year
2. 1-2 years
3. 3-4 years
4. 5-10 years
5. 11-20 years
6. 20+ years

4. Approximately what percentage of your job is usability, HCI, or human-factors related?
 _____%

5. What degrees do you hold? Please spell out degrees that do not have a well-known acronym.
 [open entry]

6. Are you a member of any of the following professional organizations? (select all that apply)

- ACM
- ACM/SIGCHI
- ACM/SIGGraph
- AIGA
- ASIS
- British HCI Group
- The Ergonomics Society
- HFES
- IEEE
- IFIP
- STC
- UPA
- None
- Other _____

7. Do you already hold any of the following professional certifications? (Select all that apply)

- AEP (Associate Ergonomics Professional through BCPE – Board of Certification in Professional Ergonomics)
- AHFP (Associate Human Factor Professional through BCPE)
- CEA (Certified Ergonomics Associate through BCPE)

- CPE (Certified Professional Ergonomist through BCPE)
- CHFP (Certified Human Factors Professional through BCPE)
- Other _____

Opinions about certification

8. Several benefits have been proposed for a usability professional certification. Tell us how much you agree with the following statements. Choose Not Applicable if a statement doesn't apply to you.

Strongly disagree -- Disagree - Neutral / don't know-- Agree Strongly agree -- Not Applicable

1. Certification would help me gain credibility within my company.
2. Certification would help me prove myself to potential employers.
3. Certification could help customers or clients understand the value of what they are getting.
4. Certification would reassure customers or clients that my firm or I know what we are doing.
5. Fewer people would try to pass themselves off as usability professionals if they had to be certified.
6. If the field were certified, the usability profession would gain legitimacy with people in other fields.
7. If the field were certified, we would have more clout in spreading awareness of the field.
8. I would be more likely to hire or recommend someone who had certification.
9. Certification would help me set hiring standards for usability professionals

9. Please add any comments you have on the benefits of certification

10. Several downsides to certification have also been raised. Tell us how much you agree with the following statements:

Strongly disagree -- Disagree - Neutral / don't know-- Agree Strongly agree -- Not Applicable

1. Certification is a waste of time. We should work on other things that matter more.
2. I already have a related degree in the field. Why should I bother with certification?
3. Certification will just give a false sense of security to clients and customers.
4. Certification doesn't take my real-world experience into account.
5. Someone who is qualified might not "pass the test" for certification.
6. If the field were certified, it might be easier for someone to sue me/a company/the certifying body.
7. Certification is a waste of time because it still wouldn't stop people from doing sloppy work.
8. It will cost me more without adding enough benefit.
9. Clients won't know or care about certification.
10. I'm not comfortable with a certification procedure because I never discuss my work because of confidentiality or competition.
11. It would be better just to have a curriculum or identified areas of study
12. It may be too expensive for some people.

11. Please add any comments you have about the downsides of certification

12. How important is it to include the following procedures in the certification process? (Please check all that you think should be included.)

1. A points system to assess eligibility based on a combination of education, training and experience
2. A synopsis written by the applicant describing how and why they have (or have not) applied particular UCD principles on recent projects
3. Submission of structured peer references
4. A written exam composed of problem-solving questions
5. One or more structured interviews

13. Please add any other procedures that should be included, or comments you have on the certification process.

14. For each of the following statements, indicate the value of usability certification to you

Not valuable at all – not very valuable- neutral / don't know - somewhat valuable- extremely valuable – not applicable

1. As a personal assessment of my skills

2. As a guide for personal development in becoming a more skilled professional
3. As part of a professional resume
4. As part of a professional development plan used by organizations
5. To establish professional/pay level within organizations
6. To establish the credentials of usability vendors/consultants
7. To demonstrate the value of my work to clients/customers
8. To promote professional excellence within the field
9. To help organizations understand the value of UCD and usability

15. Please add any comments you have on the value of certification

16. A professional Code of Conduct should be included as part of a certification program.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral / Don't know
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

17. Please add any comments you have on the Code of Conduct

18. How important is it that the certification scheme be agreed on and recognized internationally?

1. Very unimportant
2. Not important
3. Neutral
4. Important
5. Very important

19. What should the scope of a usability certification be (please check all that you think should be included):

- Understanding and applying a user-centered design process
- Identifying and analyzing user needs
- Defining the context in which the system will be used
- Conducting usability evaluations
- Proposing design solutions
- Interface design
- Other (please specify)

20. Indicate how likely you would be to seek usability certification for yourself:

1. Extremely unlikely
2. Somewhat unlikely
3. Neutral/Don't know
4. Somewhat likely
5. Extremely likely
6. Does not apply to my position

Governance

Your opinions about how a certification process might be administered.

21. If a usability certification program is implemented, who should govern it?

- The Usability Professionals' Association
- An independent consortium with representatives from UPA, other professional organizations, and other stakeholders
- Don't know
- Other: _____

22. How important is the involvement of the UPA (Usability Professionals' Association) in developing, administering and conducting usability professional certification?

1. Very unimportant
2. Not important
3. Neutral / Don't know
4. Important
5. Very important

23. Please explain your answer about the involvement of the UPA

24. How useful would it be to certify usability training courses that could contribute to eligibility for certification?

1. Very unimportant
2. Not important
3. Neutral / Don't know
4. Important
5. Very important

25. Certified usability professionals should be required to renew their certification periodically by demonstrating maintenance of competencies.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral / Don't know
- Agree
- Strongly agree

26. Please explain your answer about certification renewal

Costs

27. What is the maximum that you would pay to be certified?.

Maximum (US\$) _____

28. If you were certified, who would most likely pay for your certification?

1. Myself
2. My employer
3. Don't know
4. Not applicable

29. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?