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Background

More than two-thirds of US adults who are considering further education report that they prefer a non-degree credential, such as a certificate, license, certification, badge, or microcredential. That figure has risen in the post-pandemic period, up from about one-half of US adults prior to the pandemic.¹ With growing interest in and investment by federal and state policymakers and other stakeholders in opportunities for short-term flexible options to prepare individuals for the workforce, it is essential that we cultivate a better understanding of noncredit education – where a great number of learners attain or prepare to attain non-degree credentials. Many educational institutions award noncredit certificates, badges, and microcredentials, and/or prepare learners to earn certifications and licenses awarded by other entities.

Despite the importance of this information, multiple analyses have shown that not all states collect noncredit data; only about three-quarters of states collect any data on their noncredit programming.² Among these states, noncredit data vary substantially in coverage, quality, and operationalization of key variables. Consequently, direct comparisons of states' noncredit programming are difficult at best and sometimes are simply impossible, impeding efforts to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the noncredit education landscape in US community colleges.³

Very little is known about the characteristics of noncredit programs at the most basic level—instructional time, instructional format, requirements for entry, linkages to further education, cost, types of non-degree credentials awarded, and awarding agencies. Using a systematic approach for documenting program-level information about community college noncredit offerings is essential to inform ongoing policy developments and ensure that these policies accurately reflect the realities of noncredit education.

The Rutgers Education and Employment Research Center and key partners at University of North Carolina at Charlotte, University of Michigan, and University of California–Irvine, with support from the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES)/National Science Foundation, are working in close partnership with state leaders across the country to examine noncredit data with three key aims:

- » Develop an inventory and consistent operational definitions of state-level noncredit data elements to better understand the noncredit data infrastructure.

1 Strada. (2020, September 16). Public viewpoint: Interested but not enrolled: Understanding and serving aspiring adult learners. <https://cci.stradaeducation.org/pv-release-september-16-2020/>

2 Erwin, M. (2019). Noncredit enrollment and related activities (NPEC 2019). National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, with US Department of Education funding. https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/pdf/NPEC/data/NPEC_Paper_Noncredit_Enrollment_and_Related_Activities.pdf

3 D'Amico, M. M. (2017). Noncredit education: Specialized programs to meet local needs. In K. B. Wilson & R. L. Garza-Mitchell (Eds.), *Forces Shaping Community College Missions* (No. 180, pp. 57–66). New directions for community colleges. Jossey-Bass. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20281>; Erwin, Noncredit enrollment; Romano, R. M., & D'Amico, M. M. (2021, July/August). How federal data short-change the community college. *Change: The magazine of higher learning*, 53(4), 22–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2021.1930978>

- » Collect and examine noncredit course/program-level data to explore noncredit offerings, enrollment rates, outcomes, instructional characteristics, and financial arrangements.
- » Uncover the drivers of noncredit offerings and derive relevant policy implications.

In addition to this analysis, the project is convening a learning community of state representatives focused on data infrastructure for noncredit education and non-degree credentials. This project lays the groundwork for common definitional language to inform future data collection and analysis efforts and to improve the understanding of the value and quality of noncredit programs and non-degree credentials.

Methods

This report follows a series of state-level reports on Iowa, Louisiana, and Virginia that explored the noncredit data infrastructure and presented descriptive analyses of data at the course/program level for each individual state.⁴ The findings presented in each of these reports, including the current report that synthesizes results across the three states, were derived through a collaborative approach involving leaders from all three partner states. Research team members worked closely with state leaders to identify data elements pertaining to community college noncredit offerings at the course/program level, which is our unit of analysis for this project, captured at the state level. Further, the research team gathered information on the policy context for noncredit offerings, including state-level data collection that frame what data are available and why. By examining the data elements on noncredit education available in each state, the research team compared these findings both to develop a set of common operational definitions and data inventory as well as to better understand the similarities and differences in noncredit programming and data availability.

The following sections discuss the policy context for noncredit community college education in the three states, followed by a comparison of available data, including a comparison of descriptive findings. The report concludes with lessons learned and recommendations for building the noncredit data infrastructure across states.

4 D'Amico, M. M. et al. (2022, August). Iowa noncredit data snapshot, *Education and Employment Research Center Issue Brief*. https://sites.rutgers.edu/state-noncredit-data/wp-content/uploads/sites/794/2023/03/Iowa-State-Noncredit-Data-Report_FINAL.pdf; Bahr, P. et al. (2023, March). Louisiana noncredit data snapshot. *Education and Employment Research Center Issue Brief*. https://sites.rutgers.edu/state-noncredit-data/wp-content/uploads/sites/794/2023/03/Louisiana-State-Noncredit-Data-Report_FINAL-1.pdf; Xu, D. et al. (2023, March). Virginia Community College System (VCCC) noncredit data snapshot. *Education and Employment Research Center Issue Brief*.

Policy Context for Noncredit Data

The state policy context for noncredit education is an important driver for the availability of data and varies substantially across states. For the three states in this project, we review the essential elements of their state policy context related to noncredit data, including their mission and priorities, their funding, and the ultimate drivers of their noncredit data collection.

Noncredit Mission and Priorities

Each of the three states partnering on this project offered an array of noncredit offerings to meet local and state needs with a focus on occupational needs. Most of Virginia’s offerings are focused on occupational training, which increased substantially as a result of the New Economy Workforce Credential Grant, which was passed during the 2016 session with the goal of creating and sustaining a demand-driven supply of credentialed workers for high-demand occupations in the commonwealth through state-level funding initiatives. In addition, Virginia delivers noncredit education in the areas of adult literacy and personal enrichment. Similarly, community colleges in Iowa deliver noncredit offerings in occupational education linking to credentials and licensure but also have enrollment numbers in a variety of other areas: adult literacy and language development, education for those who are incarcerated, personal interest, and an array court-ordered courses. Much like Virginia, many of Iowa’s noncredit priorities are driven by funding streams. Louisiana also has a strong focus on occupational noncredit education, which is connected to their Board of Regents’ attainment goal of having 60 percent of adults earning a degree or “credential of value” by 2030. Louisiana’s recorded noncredit education is almost exclusively focused on career preparation. Thus, the area of greatest consistency across the three states is a strong focus on noncredit education designed to meet the needs of the state, mostly involving preparation for the workforce.

Funding

Noncredit funding nationally is inconsistent across states and considerably different from funding for credit programs. Across the three partner states, Iowa is the only one that has state formula funding for noncredit offerings. Noncredit offerings that are eligible for State General Aid in Iowa meet any of the following criteria: address a state or federal mandate, be state recognized or court ordered; intend to enhance employability or improve academic success; focus on skills for participants to influence the community or policy; or further family development or health. One year of full-time-equivalent instruction is 800 contact hours.

Each state utilizes special funding streams to support students pursuing noncredit education, especially in occupational areas. In Louisiana, which until recently lacked formula funding, students historically self-funded, utilized WIOA or SNAP education and training funds, or participated in employer-based training. However, driven by the Louisiana Board of Regents’ attainment goal, is the new M. J. Foster Promise program. The program opens the door to funded noncredit education that is demand-driven and addresses statewide priorities by offering a last-dollar funding mechanism for students aged 21 and older who enroll in credit or noncredit programs in high-demand employment areas.

Virginia's primary funding stream for noncredit education is expressly focused on training in high-demand fields that are a priority for the state. In 2016, Virginia passed the New Economy Workforce Grant Program leading to the FastForward program. FastForward is a performance-based model through which costs are shared evenly among the state, students, and the college if a student successfully completes the program. If the student does not complete, their share increases from one-third to two-thirds of the cost, and the college does not receive the state funds. In addition, if the student further receives an industry-recognized credential within six months of completing a program, the state will pay the institution's one-third. Additional funds are also in place to support students who are unable to cover their one-third share based on need. In addition, Virginia has dedicated funding through the Get A Skill, Get a Job, Get Ahead (G3) program to aid low-income students in high-demand training areas (including training in both noncredit and credit-bearing programs).

While Iowa is the only state of the three to receive formula funding for noncredit enrollments, the Hawkeye State also has a series of special funding streams to support students in noncredit education. For instance, Gap Tuition Assistance is a need-based grant, while the Workforce Training and Economic Development Fund supports training related to state industry cluster priorities, and the Pathways for Academic Career and Employment program, which is need-based, includes resources for costs such as transportation and child care. Iowa's example demonstrates how multiple funding avenues can come together to support students' diverse needs matched with economic priorities of the state.

Similar to the comparison of state noncredit missions and priorities, the available funding for noncredit education is primarily focused on connections with occupational training and a focus on the needs of employers and/or workforce-relevant credentials. The Cross-State Comparison section of this report provides additional details about funding mechanisms.

Drivers of Noncredit Data Collection

Funding is a clear driver of data. Prior literature on community college noncredit education has documented the lack of consistent data collection across states while also revealing that one strong connection between states with funding was that they were more closely associated with data reporting at the state level. All three states discussed in this report had established at least one funding stream specifically designated for noncredit education and had launched corresponding efforts to collect noncredit data at the state level.

In Louisiana, the MJ Foster program necessitates data collection on noncredit programs to demonstrate alignment with criteria specified by the Louisiana Board of Regents for credentials of value and on-ramp credentials.⁵ These criteria require data about competencies acquired, alignment with selected high-demand occupations designated by the Louisiana Workforce Commission, and employment and wage outcomes, among other information.

5 Louisiana Board of Regents. (2020, Sep. 23). Board of Regents policy: Quality postsecondary credentials of value. <https://www.laregents.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/PRP-VII.E.2-Quality-Postsecondary-Credentials-of-Value-Exec-Summary-Removed.pdf>

Somewhat similarly, Iowa’s funding for noncredit through multiple streams necessitates data collection for accountability, enrollment verification, and to provide what is needed to clearly demonstrate the outcomes of each source of funding. Likewise, in Virginia, in addition to a legislative mandate to collect noncredit (Authority: Title 23.1, Chapter 29, Code of Virginia part of Economic Development Services), a driver behind collecting noncredit data is the Workforce Grant for FastForward programs, which requires verification of enrollments, completions, and outcomes including industry-recognized credential and additional labor market measures to comply with the funding model. An additional driver of noncredit data for Iowa was their early adoption of the American Association of Community Colleges’ Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA), an effort for community colleges to measure their outcomes in ways appropriate to community colleges, including the capturing of noncredit enrollment and outcomes. The VFA includes measures for noncredit career and technical education enrollments; completions, with particular interest in completing 180 hours or more; and additional outcomes including earned credentials, wages and earnings, and subsequent college enrollment.⁶

In addition to funding, Louisiana’s attainment goal has been a primary driver for its state noncredit data. This includes not only college degrees but also other “credentials of value” such as industry-based certifications, which often are the aim of occupational noncredit offerings. This broader definition of attainment led the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) to align noncredit data collection with credit data collection in a single, unified student information system using Banner. LCTCS purchased a Banner license for all 12 colleges in their system to enable the noncredit data entry, collection, and utilization at both the college and system levels. This alignment is facilitating system efforts to achieve systemwide standardized data collection and data elements.

6 American Association of Community Colleges. (2023). *Voluntary framework of accountability: Metrics manual version 10*. <https://vfa.aacc.nche.edu/media/1006/vfa-metrics-manual-2023.pdf>

Noncredit Data Inventory

An essential foundation for the comparison across states is to examine the commonalities across how noncredit is defined and measured. We began that process by examining the unit of analysis of noncredit offerings across the three states and assessing the availability of a series of data elements across the states.

Classifying Noncredit Offerings

Noncredit offerings are a common unit of analysis across programs and courses. As previously noted, the unit of analysis for our descriptive findings is the course/program. However, throughout the current project we have elected to refer to noncredit courses and programs as “offerings” due to the varied terminology and definitions used across states. For instance, Virginia uses “course” to refer to offerings with a variety of formats and lengths. Iowa typically refers to noncredit offerings with tangible value and meeting a 32-contact-hour threshold as a “program.” Unlike credit-based programs, a noncredit program in Iowa is not necessarily a grouping of courses; it could be just one offering. Louisiana’s use of the term “program” encompasses a variety of formats and lengths that share the common criterion of leading to a credential of value or on-ramp credential. The term “offering” allows us to make comparisons across states in a relatively consistent way with a common language.

The number of offerings vary widely across states, but at times, much of that variation can be attributed to differences in how the states count them. As shown in Table 1, Iowa reported 924 noncredit offerings. Offerings are counted as unique occurrences when each of fifteen community colleges offer courses or programs in a particular CIP code. Essentially, the 924 unique offerings is an aggregate of the total number of CIP codes offered at each college. Louisiana reported a total of 397 noncredit offerings across eight of the twelve community colleges in the LCTCS. Data were not available for the remaining four colleges. Offerings are counted as unique occurrences when there is a unique combination of course and program name offered by any community college for which data were available. Virginia reported 6,045 noncredit offerings. Offerings were counted as unique occurrences each time a specific course was offered at a specific time by any LCTCS college.

TABLE 1. State’s Definitions and Methods for Identifying Unique Offerings

STATE	NUMBER UNIQUE OFFERINGS	DEFINITION OF UNIQUE OFFERING	OFFERING IS NECESSARILY UNIQUE TO A COLLEGE	NOTE ON COLLEGES OFFERING DATA
Iowa	924	Course or program uses a unique CIP code	no	Across Iowa’s 15 community colleges
Louisiana	397	Unique combination of course and program name	yes	From 8 of 12 community colleges in the Louisiana Community and Technical College System
Virginia	6,045	A specific course is offered at a specific time by a college	yes	Across colleges within the Virginia Community College System

Data Availability

Throughout the process of working with partner states, the project team collaborated with state leaders to understand available data elements, categorize them, and develop operational definitions to identify some consistent understanding of what noncredit data are collected at the state level. Table 2 shows a snapshot of the data available in respective states for the 2020–2021 academic year. Note that the information provided is based on data available at the offering level and does not necessarily indicate that data were available on all students, even for offerings on which data were collected. Data on individual students, particularly related to demographics, often were missing.

The data elements that exist in each state vary, making cross-state comparisons challenging (see Table 2). This challenge is indicative of an environment without federal (e.g., IPEDS) data collection that sets standard definitions and reporting mechanisms for data collection. However, as a part of this project and our ongoing collaboration with states, we have worked to operationalize definitions that can be both understood and used by multiple states.

TABLE 2. State-Level Noncredit Data Availability at the Offering (Course/Program) Level

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY ⁷	STATE-LEVEL DATA AVAILABILITY BY NONCREDIT OFFERINGS		
		IOWA	LOUISIANA	VIRGINIA
Field of Study	Course/Program Name	All	All	All
	CIP Code	All	Most	Most
	SOC Code	Most	Many	None
	Career Cluster	Most	Most	Most
Noncredit Type	Occupational Training, Sponsored Occupational (Contract) Training, Pre-College, Personal Interest	Most	Most	All
Non-Degree Credentials Associated with Offering	Industry Certification	Many	Many	Most
	Occupational Licensure	Some	Some	Most
	College-Issued Certificate	Many	Many	None
	Microcredentials	None	Some	None
	Apprenticeship	None	None	None
Student Outcomes	Students Continue to Credit	All	Some	All
	Completion Data Availability	All	Most	All
	Pre-Enrollment Employment	Many	Some	All
	Post-Enrollment Employment	Many	Some	All
	Pre-Enrollment Salary/Wage	Many	Some	All
	Post-Employment Salary/Wage	Many	Some	All

7 Operational definitions are available at https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/EERC/Data%20Definitions%20Report_Final%208.16.22tc.pdf

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY ⁷	STATE-LEVEL DATA AVAILABILITY BY NONCREDIT OFFERINGS		
		IOWA	LOUISIANA	VIRGINIA
Program Length and Admission	Number of Courses if Multi-Course Program	Some	Some	All
	Total Contact (Clock) Hours	All	Most	All
	Admission Requirements	None	Most	None
Delivery	Face-to-Face	All	Most	All
	Face-to-Face Location	None	Most	All
	Online	All	Many	All
	Blended	All	Some	All
	Competency-Based	None	Many	Many
	Work-Based Learning	None	Many	None
	Student Service Availability	Some	Many	Many
	Course/Program Tuition	None	Most	All
Finance	State Reimbursement	All	None	Most
	WIOA-Eligible Training Provider by Course/Program	Most	Some	Most
	Economic Development Incentive	All	Some	None
	Other Federal Grants	None	Some	Most
	Other State Grants	All	Some	Most
	Faculty Data	None	Most	All
	Headcount	All	Many	All
Enrollment and Identifiers	Race/Ethnicity	All	Many	All
	Age	All	Many	All
	Sex/Gender	All	Many	All
	Social Security Number	All	Most	All
	Institutional Identification Number	All	Most	Most
	Names	All	Most	Most
	Birth Dates	All	Most	Most

Data Availability Legend

Indicates the degree to which data are available on each data element at the offering (course/program) level.

All	Data are available on all noncredit offerings.
Most	Data are available on 2/3 or more offerings.
Many	Data are available on more than 1/3 but fewer than 2/3 of offerings.
Some	Data are available on 1/3 or fewer offerings.
None	Data are available on no offerings.

Note: The availability of data by course and program does not guarantee that data are available on all students within programs for which data are available. Missing data values are particularly common in demographic categories for noncredit enrollments.

Cross-State Data Comparison

To better understand the role that noncredit education plays and who it serves, we examined basic characteristics of noncredit program offerings and the students who enroll in them. We focused on points of intersection where comparisons could be made across at least two (in many cases three) states in noncredit offerings and enrollment, the availability of outcomes data, instructional characteristics, and the financing of noncredit.

Offerings and Enrollment

Across all three states, workforce-oriented program offerings were most common. Occupational/vocational was the most common type of noncredit offering in all three states, comprising 71 percent of courses/programs in Iowa, 80 percent in Louisiana, and 82 percent in Virginia (see Figure 1). Occupational/vocational was also the noncredit offering type with the greatest concentration of students in 2020–21 in both Iowa (66%) and Virginia (76%), the only states for which headcount enrollment data were available (see Figure 2). Pre-college offerings were 7 percent of Iowa’s noncredit offerings and 3 percent of Virginia’s. While pre-college is an established noncredit type, it is likely that pre-college noncredit enrollments are more common in states in which community colleges are a primary provider of adult education (e.g., GED preparation, ABE, ESL).

FIGURE 1. Percentage of Noncredit Offerings by Type

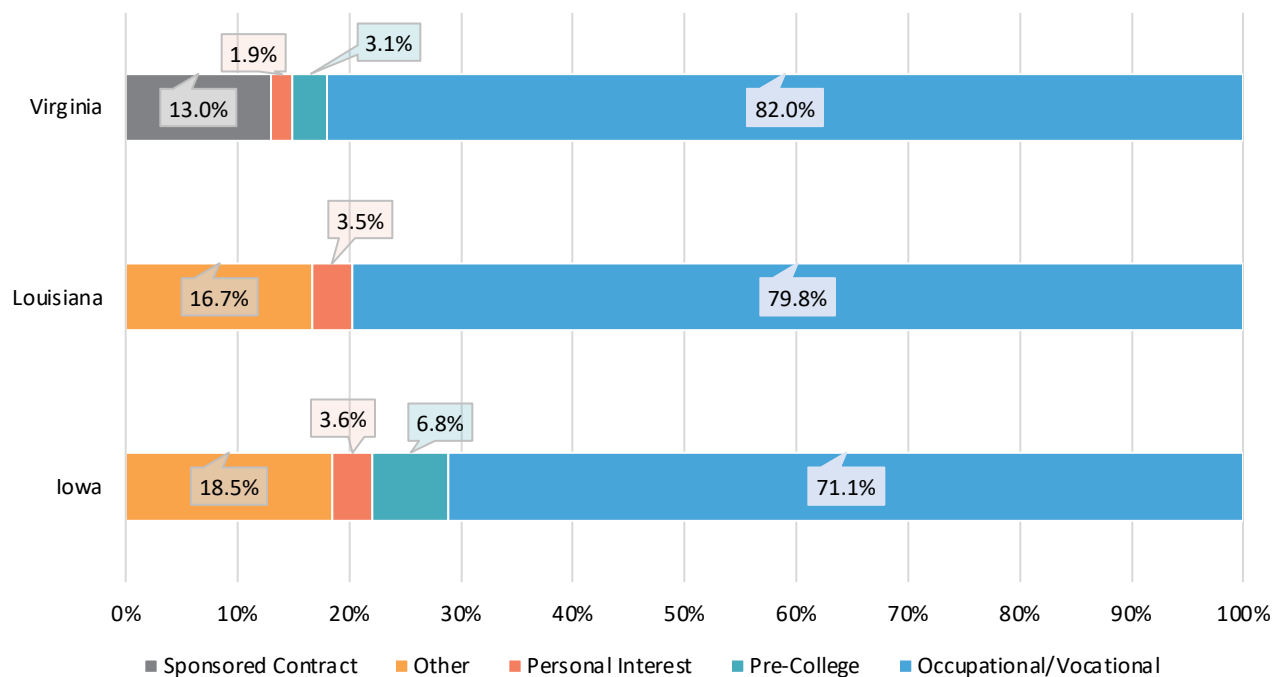
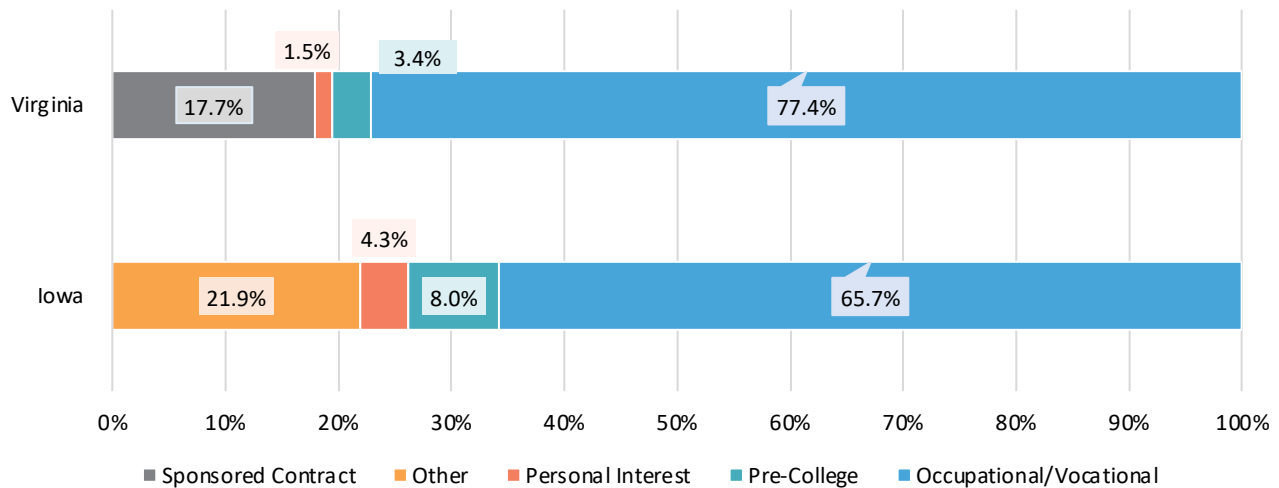


FIGURE 2. Percentage of 2020-21 Headcount Enrollment by Type



Gender distributions vary by state. The enrollments by sex/gender and race/ethnicity provided in Figures 3 and 4 focus specifically on the occupational/vocational offerings most aligned with workforce preparation. Without accounting for enrollments with missing data, women represented a greater share of occupational/vocational noncredit enrollments in Iowa and Virginia, and a smaller share in Louisiana. This variation by gender may reflect variation in program offerings within each state, as we explore later in this analysis.

FIGURE 3. Percent Enrollment in Occupational/Vocational Noncredit Offerings by Sex

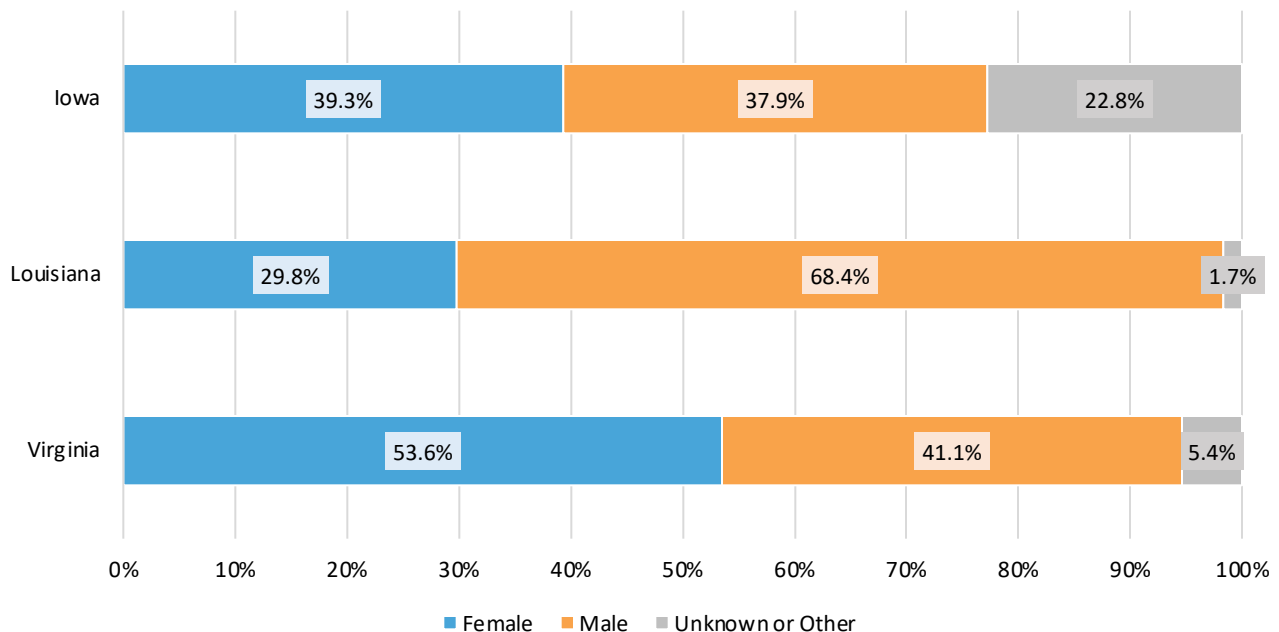
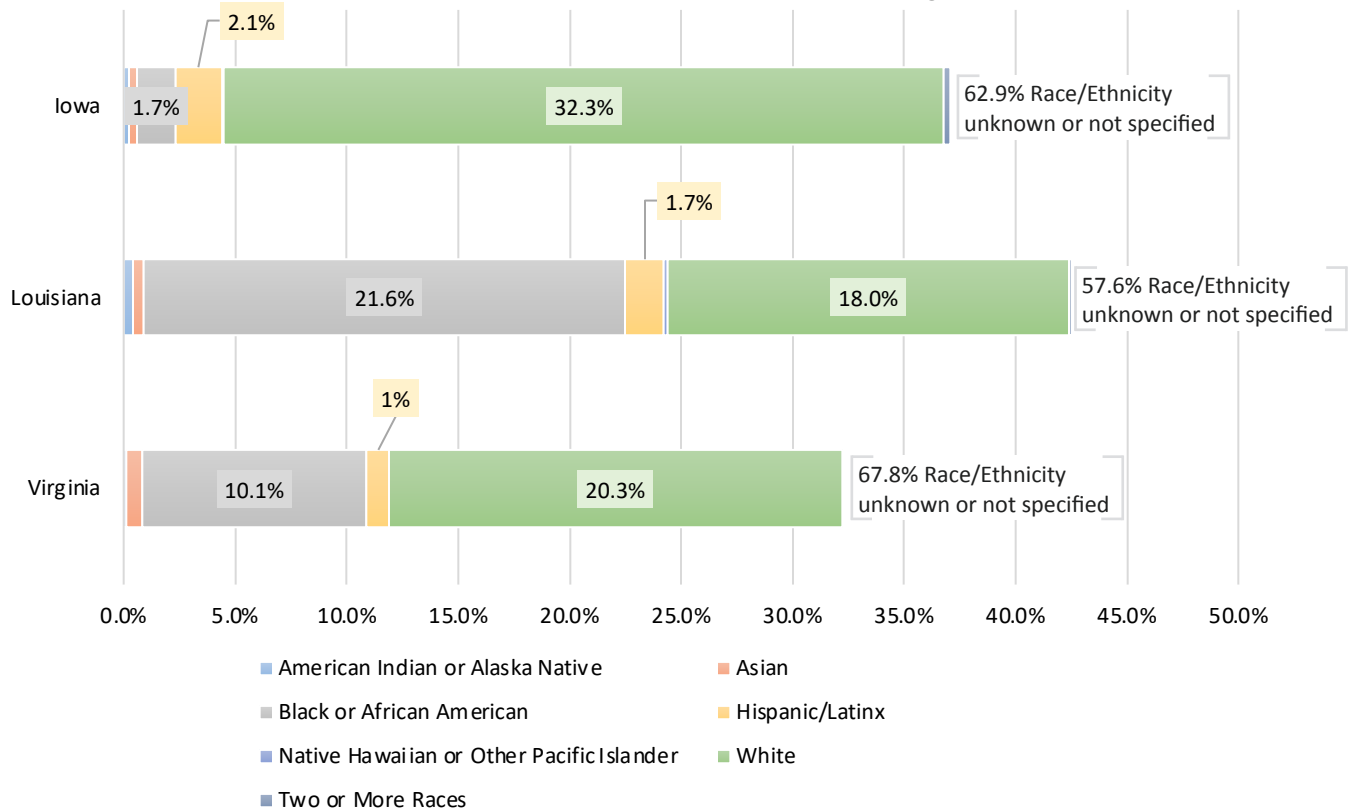


FIGURE 4. Percent Enrollment in Occupational/Vocational Noncredit Offerings by Race and Ethnicity



Data on race and ethnicity often are missing. Enrollment distributions by race/ethnicity are more difficult to interpret due to the high degree of missingness, which is common in prior noncredit studies.⁸ When removing missing data, however, the enrollment patterns by race among occupational offering enrollees generally reflect credit enrollments in respective states.

Instructional Characteristics

The length of noncredit offerings varied, but many offerings were quite short. Key findings regarding the instructional characteristics of noncredit education across the states are shown in Table 3. Contact hours were highest within each state for FastForward in Virginia, occupational training in Louisiana, and pre-college offerings in Iowa. Still, considering the context of potential federal funding through short-term Pell Grants, no mean or median contact-hour figure reached the proposed 150-hour threshold.

Noncredit is offered in varying modalities, but the majority were conducted in person. For each noncredit type in each state, a majority of offerings were face-to-face, while lower percentages were online, and the lowest percentage in blend delivery modes. Even with elevated offerings of online higher education in the pandemic/post-pandemic periods, noncredit education in the three states was largely offered in a traditional face-to-face format.

⁸ Bahr, P. et al. (2023, March). Louisiana noncredit data snapshot. Education and Employment Research Center Issue Brief. https://sites.rutgers.edu/state-noncredit-data/wp-content/uploads/sites/794/2023/03/Louisiana-State-Noncredit-Data-Report_FINAL-1.pdf;

TABLE 3. Instructional Characteristics by Noncredit Type

Noncredit Type	CONTACT HOURS			DELIVERY***		
	N	Median	Mean	% Face-to-Face	% Blended Face-to-Face/Online	% Online
Occupational Training						
Iowa	657	26	51	75.0	6.8	45.5
Louisiana*	316	40	114	97.0	6.1	32.9
Virginia						
<i>FastForward</i>	2,006	100	112	91.9	5.4	2.7
<i>Non-FastForward</i>	2,952	15	35	61.0	4.2	34.9
Pre-College**						
Iowa	63	97	114	88.9	12.7	30.2
Virginia	187	50	87	96.3	0.0	3.7
Personal Interest						
Iowa	33	11	16	72.7	0.0	60.6
Louisiana*	14	30	29	100.0	0.0	28.6
Virginia	117	6	9	65.0	0.9	34.2

* Data for Louisiana are for 8 out of 12 colleges.

** The Pre-College category is not applicable for Louisiana.

*** Delivery mode percentages are based on counts of offerings offered at least once using a particular mode. Some offerings are available in different modes at different times. Therefore, delivery mode percentages may not sum to 100 for a noncredit offering type.

States varied in the types of credentials awarded through occupational offerings. Table 4 shows the percent of noncredit offerings aligned with credentials by type (occupational training, pre-college, and personal interest) in each state in our study. There was great variation in terms of both data availability and the presence of a certificate (awarded upon completion of a program of study) or certification (awarded typically by an industry group based on successfully passing an examination of relevant competencies), so those results are separated in the table. Note that it is possible for one noncredit offering to lead to both a certificate and a certification. At least three-quarters of occupational noncredit offerings in Iowa (79.6%) and Louisiana (75.2%) led to a college-issued certificate. All of Virginia’s FastForward occupational offerings, on the other hand, were associated with certifications awarded by industry, as were about half (53.9%) of those offered in Iowa, and nearly all (93.2%) offered in Louisiana.

TABLE 4. Associated Credentials by Noncredit Type

Noncredit Type	ASSOCIATED CREDENTIAL			
	N for College-Awarded Certificate	% College-Awarded Certificate	N for Industry-Awarded Certification	% Industry-Awarded Certification
Occupational Training				
Iowa	280	79.6	280	53.9
Louisiana*	310	75.2	220	93.2
Virginia				
<i>FastForward</i>	2006	***	2006	100.0
<i>Non-FastForward</i>	2952	***	2952	0.0
Pre-College**				
Iowa	3	33.0	3	0.0
Virginia	187	***	187	0.0
Personal Interest				
Iowa	4	100.0	4	75.0
Louisiana*	9	55.6	9	88.9
Virginia	117	***	117	0.0

* Data for Louisiana are for 8 out of 12 colleges. The difference in the Ns in the row for Louisiana’s occupational training is a result of missing data on industry certification.

** The Pre-College category is not applicable for Louisiana.

*** Data not available.

Outcomes

Outcome data relevant to noncredit community college education include both credential attainment and employment measures. Attainment measures are typically internal measures and may include completions and college-issued certificates. Table 5 shows the richness of the completion data maintained by our three research partner states, with data available for nearly all noncredit offerings. While there was nuance regarding the definition of completion, which could mean anything from attendance to participation and evaluation, the general practice of tracking completions was common among our partner states. Attainment measures could include data that were external to institutions, such as those on industry-awarded credentials.

Employment measures typically are collected externally to the colleges. Labor market data can be gathered via matches with states wage records, as few colleges have the capacity to collect labor market data.⁹ Based on earnings data from the Virginia Economic Commission, Virginia had labor market data available for all students

9 It should be noted that UI data are subject to two major sources of missing earnings information. First, a few categories of employment are not included in the UI data, including federal employment, self-employment, and individuals without a social security number. Another source for missing data is interstate mobility: since we are only able to receive UI data in the state of Virginia, individuals working in other states throughout the entire study period would not be recorded in the local UI data.

enrolled in occupational, personal interest, and pre-college offerings, while Iowa could access data on only 42.6 of students enrolled in occupational offerings, 12.1 percent in personal interest offerings, and 4.8 percent in pre-college offerings. Louisiana had labor market data available for fewer than 10 percent of its occupational offerings, varying by type of data collected.

TABLE 5. Completion and Labor Market Data Availability by Noncredit Type

Noncredit Type	N	% with Completion Data	LABOR MARKET DATA			
			% with Pre-Enrollment Employment Data	% with Post-Enrollment Employment Data	% with Pre-Enrollment Salary/ Wage Data	% with Post-Enrollment Salary/ Wage Data
Occupational Training						
Iowa	657	100.0	42.6	42.6	42.6	42.6
Louisiana	316	99.0	9.8	9.8	4.8	1.9
Virginia						
FastForward	2,006	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Non-FastForward	2,952	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Pre-College*						
Iowa	63	100.0	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.8
Virginia	187	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Personal Interest						
Iowa	33	100.0	12.1	12.1	12.1	12.1
Louisiana	14	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Virginia	117	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

* The Pre-College category is Not Applicable for Louisiana.

Partnerships both drove and enabled states to capture better and more meaningful data that explained the value of noncredit credentials. Matching noncredit data with outcomes (i.e., labor market and credentials) often required partnerships with other state agencies. For example, the Virginia Employment Commission provided unemployment insurance (UI) records to connect with labor market (wage/employment) outcomes, just as the Virginia’s Departments of Health and Labor & Industry allowed the state to connect FastForward completions with licensures. Iowa enjoyed similar partnerships that allowed them to measure labor market outcomes, and to identify state licensure for all health care fields and commercial truck driving. Table 6 lists data partners of primary agencies responsible for noncredit community college data and the types of data that could be obtained via data matching. These partnerships were negotiated and established by the states over a number of years as their noncredit data systems were developed.

TABLE 6. Data Partners and Types of Data Matched to Noncredit

IOWA	LOUISIANA	VIRGINIA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Corrections (data on students in incarceration and comparison groups) • Department of Education (high school students/graduates) • Department of Inspection and Appeals (Certified Nurse Assistant licensing – CNA) • Department of Public Health (health occupational and related licenses other than CNA) • Department of Transportation (commercial driver’s licenses) • Workforce Development (employment and wages) • National Student Clearinghouse (postsecondary enrollment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Commission (employment and wages) • Board of Regents (enrollments and completers) • Department of Children and Family Services – SNAP Employment and Training (enrollments and completers) • National Student Clearinghouse (post-secondary enrollment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Commission (employment and wages) • Department of Health Professions (Nursing and other health occupational and related licenses, including CNA) • Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (skilled trades, cosmetology, athletics, and other regulated occupational licenses) • Department of Social Services (as a SNAP 50/50 provider and for special research and collaborative projects) • National Student Clearinghouse (postsecondary enrollment)

Finance

Funding varied greatly across states, but universally, funding drove data collection. Previous studies have demonstrated a strong connection between noncredit funding and noncredit data collection. Therefore, it is not surprising that funding was available in our three research partner states that have rich noncredit data. Still, the data across states demonstrate that there was no one consistent funding mechanism (see Table 7); availability and degree of funding was highly variable. Iowa, for example, was unique among the three states for its significant state enrollment-based funding. Community colleges in Iowa received state reimbursement funding for 99 percent of its occupational training and 87 percent of its pre-college noncredit offerings. Additional state grants were also available for nine of every ten pre-college offerings. Funding in Louisiana was much more limited, with less than 1 percent of its noncredit offerings eligible for state reimbursement in 2020–2021, and 5 percent of occupational offerings eligible for other state grants. Virginia’s funding reflected the state’s priorities; its community colleges received state funds for FastForward offerings with a pay-for-performance model and outcome-dependent student tuition reimbursements. Virginia community colleges also received a lump sum of general state funds to cover operational costs associated with noncredit education.

Another purpose of noncredit occupational education is to deliver customized or sponsored contract training and training offered to companies as an economic development incentive. Virginia was the only state with available enrollment data that showed a clear line separating occupational and sponsored occupational noncredit education. The financial data, however, provided additional context. Iowa data indicate that just under one-quarter of occupational training courses/programs were offered as an economic development incentive, while in Louisiana, 14 percent of noncredit occupational offerings were eligible for economic developmental incentive funding.

TABLE 7. Noncredit Funding Mechanisms across States

FUNDING TYPES/STATE	IOWA	LOUISIANA	VIRGINIA
State Enrollment-Based Funding Formula	✓		
Special Initiative Funding for Occupational Training in Workforce Priority Areas	✓	✓	✓
Need-Based Funding for Occupational Training	✓		✓
Need-Based Funding for Wraparound Student Support	✓		✓

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The evidence from across the three partner states shows a few key takeaways.

State goals manifested via funding are drivers of noncredit data. Funding is the primary driver of noncredit data collection. Data from across our three partner states makes it clear that state-level priorities drive noncredit offerings. These priorities are presented in multiple ways. For example, Virginia’s FastForward and Iowa’s formula and special priority funding mechanisms demonstrate state-level commitments to workforce and occupational preparation through noncredit education, whereas Louisiana’s inclusion of noncredit education avenues in their statewide attainment goal also serves as a driver. Each of the three states has a strong community college system focused on workforce and career education, which supports these state priorities and the prevalence of noncredit offerings and enrollments in the occupational type. In states where adult high school completion (e.g., GED preparation, ABE) rests with community colleges, there may also be a high concentration of pre-college offerings to match that portion of the mission.

- » **RECOMMENDATION 1:** Ensure that noncredit offerings and associated data reflect the near- and long-term priorities of the state and community college system.

Many states are engaged in the development or improvement of noncredit data infrastructure. The infrastructure is built over time through the evolution of systems, expansion of data collection, and the demand placed on infrastructure to meet state needs to demonstrate the value of community college noncredit education. One of the key lessons learned is that states have great autonomy to collect data elements that they identify as priorities; even some of the most robust state-level data sets are constantly changing and evolving. We describe this evolution as the *state noncredit data journey*, which recognizes that noncredit data infrastructures are built over time.

This case study of three model states with rich noncredit data has shown that the data elements captured on offerings are not always consistent, nor are they static. Without mandated federal reporting on noncredit enrollments through IPEDS, each state determines if and what data are collected. In many cases, the motivations for state-level data collection are related to enrollment but may apply to other priorities. For instance, state funding often carries with it reporting requirements that make it mandatory for community colleges to capture information on enrollments or contact hours. Noncredit types also may be captured in an effort to identify the enrollments that count toward state-level funding and/or make the case for additional funding.

- » **RECOMMENDATION 2:** Take an inventory of current data elements captured within individual states, and set an agenda for adding relevant data elements over time.

Often, adding meaningful data elements like labor market outcomes and data on non-degree credentials will require partnerships. Building the infrastructure and partnerships now will be helpful if/when IPEDS data collection expands to include noncredit.

- » **RECOMMENDATION 3:** Prioritize the collection of demographic data to provide avenues for more nuanced understandings of educational access and equity.

Adding demographic elements may be particularly challenging when delivering contract training for employers or when colleges are relying on third-party instructional providers, but there could be great value in doing so. Understanding the nuances of enrollment may help determine how noncredit education could be a pathway to further education or workplace advancement and to ensure access to and outcomes from noncredit education are equitable. Thus, while some data are necessary to meet reporting mandates and offer the potential to make the case for additional noncredit offerings or funding, other potential opportunities could follow with better information. For instance, matching noncredit data with wage and employment outcomes leads to opportunities to examine noncredit program quality through the lens of labor market outcomes. Similarly, developing data partnerships that look at the attainment of occupational licenses and third-party credentials following the completion of noncredit programming shows whether offerings are contributing to the occupational and economic development priorities of a state or region.

One area explored in the present study was the intensity of noncredit offerings in terms of contact hours. Across the three states, mean and median contact hours for noncredit courses and programs were below 120 hours. However, there are several proposals in Congress to provide short-term Pell Grant awards for offerings that meet a 150-hour and 8-week threshold.

Additionally, better data systems that either include both credit and noncredit data or could more easily merge the two provides opportunities for examining noncredit-to-credit pathways that help individuals seamlessly transition from one to the other. While noncredit-to-credit articulation is a result of prioritization, connecting the data can help encourage such arrangements. Bringing together credit and noncredit data could in some ways normalize the noncredit student experience resulting in more institutions considering wraparound supports for noncredit students similar to those provided to their credit-based counterparts.

- » **RECOMMENDATION 4:** Begin to inventory noncredit offerings that could meet the 150-contact-hour requirement currently being considered as part of the Short-Term Pell Grant proposals, and consider which collections of courses could become Pell-eligible if, packaged together, they were to lead to workforce-relevant credentials.

As states seek to develop and expand capacity to collect and report on noncredit educational activity, our three partner states demonstrate some of what is possible. While this report on noncredit data infrastructure and course/program-level data from these three states points to some gaps in what is known, it also helps show how states are working through their own noncredit data journeys. Our hope is that states currently building or expanding noncredit data systems learn from our partner states' policy arrangements, delivery, and noncredit priorities to fulfill their educational missions.

Appendix

TABLE A1. Number and Proportion of Noncredit Offerings by Type

NONCREDIT TYPE	IOWA		LOUISIANA		VIRGINIA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Occupational/Vocational	657	71.1	316	79.8	4,958	82.0
Non-Fast Forward	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2,952	48.8
Fast Forward	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2,006	33.2
Sponsored Contract	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	783	13.0
Pre-College	63	6.8	0	0.0	187	3.1
Personal Interest	33	3.6	14	3.5	117	1.9
Other	171	18.5	66	16.7	N/A	N/A
Total	924	100.0	396	100.0	6,045	100.0

TABLE A2. Enrollment in Noncredit Offerings 2020–21 by Type*

NONCREDIT TYPE	IOWA		VIRGINIA	
	n	%	n	%
Occupational/Vocational	108,231	65.7	31,699	77.4
Non-Fast Forward	N/A	N/A	19,385	47.3
Fast Forward	N/A	N/A	12,314	30.1
Sponsored Contract	N/A	N/A	7,265	17.7
Pre-College	13,206	8.0	1,383	3.4
Personal Interest	7,116	4.3	621	1.5
Other	36,101	21.9	N/A	N/A
Total	164,654	100.0	40,968	100.0

* Enrollment data is not available for all noncredit type categories in which Louisiana has offerings

TABLE A3. Percent Enrollment in Noncredit Type by Sex

NONCREDIT OFFERING TYPE AND STATE	FEMALE	MALE	UNKNOWN OR OTHER
Occupational/Vocational			
Iowa	39.3	37.9	22.8
Louisiana	29.8	68.4	1.7
Virginia	53.6	41.1	5.4
Pre-college			
Iowa	52.5	38.7	8.7
Virginia	65.9	27.8	6.3
Personal Interest			
Iowa	57.1	35.5	7.4
Virginia	51.2	41.7	7.1

TABLE A4. Percent Enrollment in Noncredit Type by Race

NONCREDIT OFFERING TYPE AND STATE	AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE	ASIAN	BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC/ LATINX	NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	WHITE	TWO OR MORE RACES	UNKNOWN/ NOT SPECIFIED
Occupational/Vocational								
Iowa	0.2	0.4	1.7	2.1	0.1	32.3	0.3	62.9
Louisiana	0.4	0.5	21.6	1.7	0.2	18.0	0.1	57.6
Virginia	0.1	0.7	10.1	1.0	0.0	20.3	*	67.8
Pre-college								
Iowa	0.9	2.8	18.2	17.8	0.2	29.6	1.6	29.0
Virginia	0.0	0.9	3.1	1.7	0.0	1.7	*	92.6
Personal Interest								
Iowa	0.2	0.9	1.7	4.8	0.1	41.4	1.1	50.0
Virginia	0.0	0.2	7.9	0.5	0.0	27.5	*	63.9

* Not a category provided.

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