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# State Noncredit Data Project: State Dashboards for Noncredit Data

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## Introduction

Capturing meaningful data on noncredit offerings is a struggle for institutions of higher education and state entities alike. Higher education institutions interested in collecting noncredit data are often starting from scratch or interpreting layers of legacy data collections, as well as working with limited resources. State entities – such as Workforce agencies, Departments of Higher Education, and the like – are posed with the challenge of standardizing these data across institutions. Both higher education institutions and state entities also face challenges in disseminating information about noncredit offerings and students in comprehensible, actionable formats to key groups like state policymakers, prospective students, and potential employers.

Dashboards and similar tools present information about education and training in an appealing, usable way. These interactive online tools can help stakeholders understand offerings, trends, and outcomes in their local area. Dashboards can help prospective students gather information about interesting programs, institutions to see noncredit trends in their area, and employers to identify potential partnerships. By linking completion data with labor market outcomes, dashboards can also help institutions and advocacy organizations make the case for noncredit programming to state policymakers.

Sparked by discussions during State Noncredit Data Project Learning Community quarterly meetings– an Education and Employment Research Center (EERC) initiative to promote peer learning among state noncredit data influences – the EERC research team identified three states with postsecondary dashboards that included noncredit-oriented features to highlight: Iowa, Maryland, and Virginia.

This Promising Practices Brief is one in a series of briefs the Education and Employment Research Center will release on strategies that policymakers and practitioners are undertaking to strengthen noncredit and nondegree education at the state level.

## Noncredit Dashboards in Three States

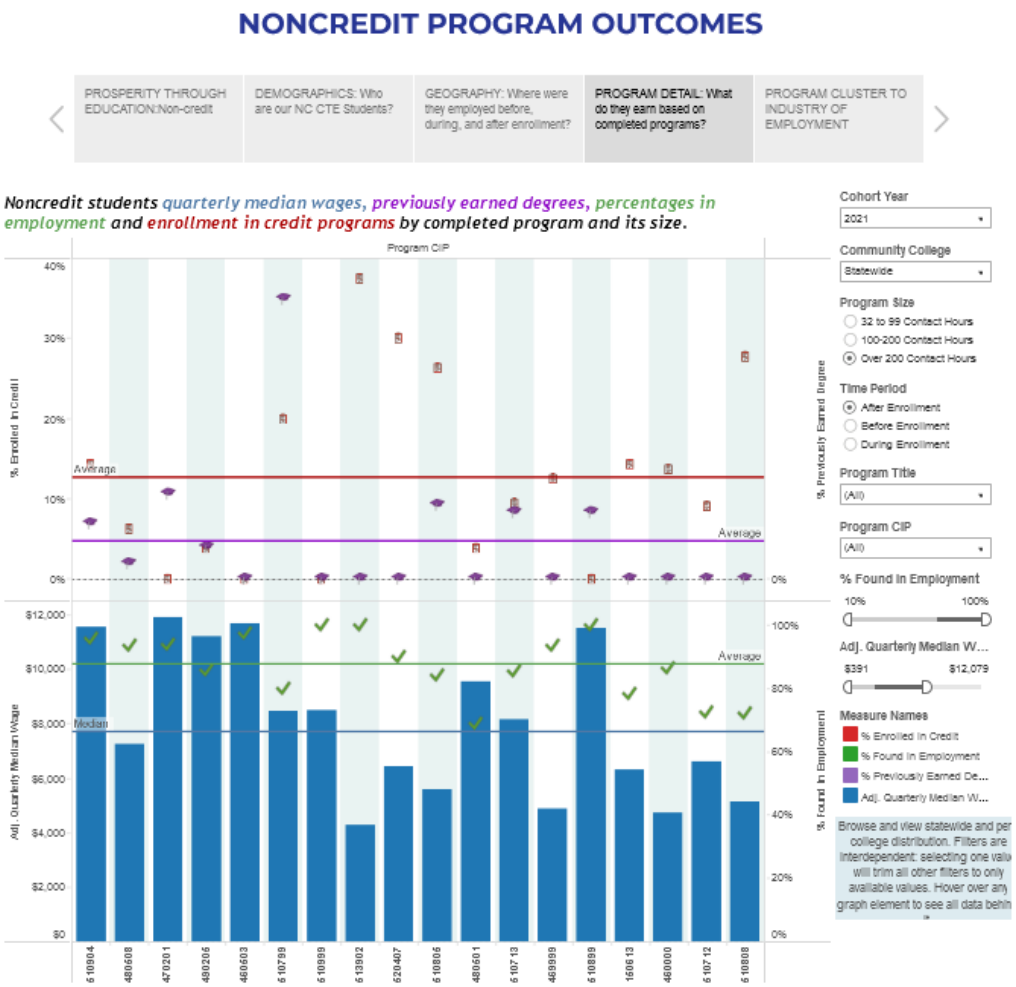
### *Iowa*

Iowa's noncredit data dashboard, "Noncredit Program Outcomes," is produced using Tableau and hosted on the Iowa Student Outcomes website. This website is the product of a collaboration between the Iowa Department of Education (IDOE), the state Board of Regents (which governs Iowa's public universities), and Iowa Workforce Development. IDOE experts developed strategies to navigate challenges in capturing and presenting noncredit data. For example, the IDOE data team works with partners like the National Student Clearinghouse to match individuals to education and training data. Since noncredit data often do not fit nicely into the structures developed for credit data, they also had to define a meaningful "cohort" for noncredit students. The state's noncredit data team also had to create a crosswalk to match course classifications of career and technical education programs with federal industry sectors for standardization and analysis purposes.

The Student Outcomes site includes pages for various types of institutions and areas of instruction in Iowa: public schools, college aid, community colleges, public universities, adult literacy, workforce development, and industry & credentials. Closest to this brief's purposes is a page devoted to Iowa's community colleges, which includes a subpage for noncredit program outcomes. The dashboard presents statewide and college-specific outcomes for noncredit career and technical education programs for 2016-2022.

The dashboard is divided into 5 topical pages. The first presents enrollment, as well as wages and employment rates. The second shows noncredit student demographics: age, gender, and race/ethnicity. These demographic elements are compared against rates of employment, enrollment in credit programs, and prior degree-holding status. The third shows the states in which students are working before, during, and after enrolling in their noncredit program, as well as their median quarterly wages. The fourth, shown in Figure 1 below, indicates students' quarterly median wages, their prior degrees, employment and credit enrollment rates, as sorted by completed program and its size. The last page is a graphic representation of which program clusters are associated with which employment industries for noncredit completers. Such information could be of particular interest to institutions planning out course offerings to meet the needs of high-demand or high-growth industries in their region. Many of the pages can be manipulated to see the data for different years, colleges, or time periods (before, during, and after enrollment). Iowa has released a report to accompany these data, "Iowa Community Colleges Noncredit Program Outcomes: Noncredit Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program," which provides additional narration, context, and insights to the online dashboard.

Figure 1: Iowa's Noncredit Program Outcomes




Staff at the Iowa Department of Education have implemented dashboards containing data on industry certification outcomes as well. Iowa has partnerships with organizations like the state Department of Transportation for CDL (Commercial Driver's License), Iowa Department of Health and Human Services and Iowa Department of Inspections, Appeals and Licensing for health science-related licenses and CompTIA, which provided the data needed to create two dashboards specific for CDL and health occupations.[1]

## *Maryland*

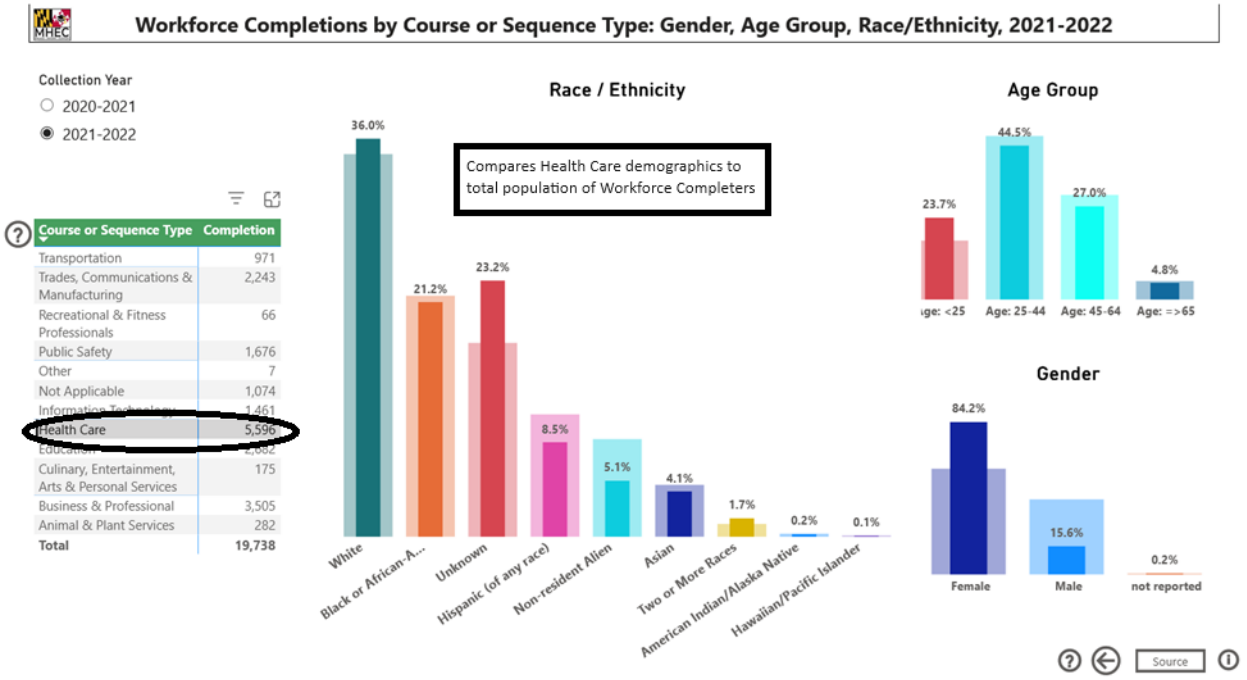
The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) has an interactive noncredit data dashboard, entitled "Students Completing Workforce Training." It was first published in the Fall of 2023, using data from the 2021-22 academic year. In the past, MHEC required colleges to submit only aggregate data, but now colleges provide unit level data, which allows for cross-cutting comparisons across various data elements.

[1] For more on Iowa's strategic noncredit data partnerships, see the EERC's Promising Practices Brief on Iowa.

This dashboard, produced using Microsoft Power BI, contains data from Maryland's sixteen community colleges who submit to the Non-Credit Workforce Completion System. The data are presented in a flipbook format. The dashboard includes various opportunities for crosstabulation of data. The first page compares the number of credit and workforce non-credit awards at each community college in the state. The next two show the number of workforce completers at each institution, unduplicated and duplicated. The next displays the demographics (race/ethnicity, age, and gender) of completers. The following page presents the number of completions by industry, length, and credential type. The final display combines the previous two, showing the demographics of completers by industry.

On each page, users can click on different elements such as industry and institution name and visually compare the subset of data to the entire sample. See Figure 3 below for an example of what the dashboard looks like during a course/sequence type comparison. There are many use cases for these cross-cutting comparisons, including students deciding between multiple potential program fields, instructors curious about how their program compares to others, or institutions seeking to improve equity in enrollment, completion, and workforce outcomes.

Figure 2. Maryland's Workforce Sequence Completers Demographic Dashboard




While this dataset only captures students who complete a noncredit workforce offering, Maryland has launched a data collection for all noncredit course takers, which will allow for a more comprehensive dataset. The dashboard also includes a comprehensive technical note with definitions of key terms, an important

safeguard in the "wild west" of noncredit, where a lack of standardization raises the risk of data misinterpretation.

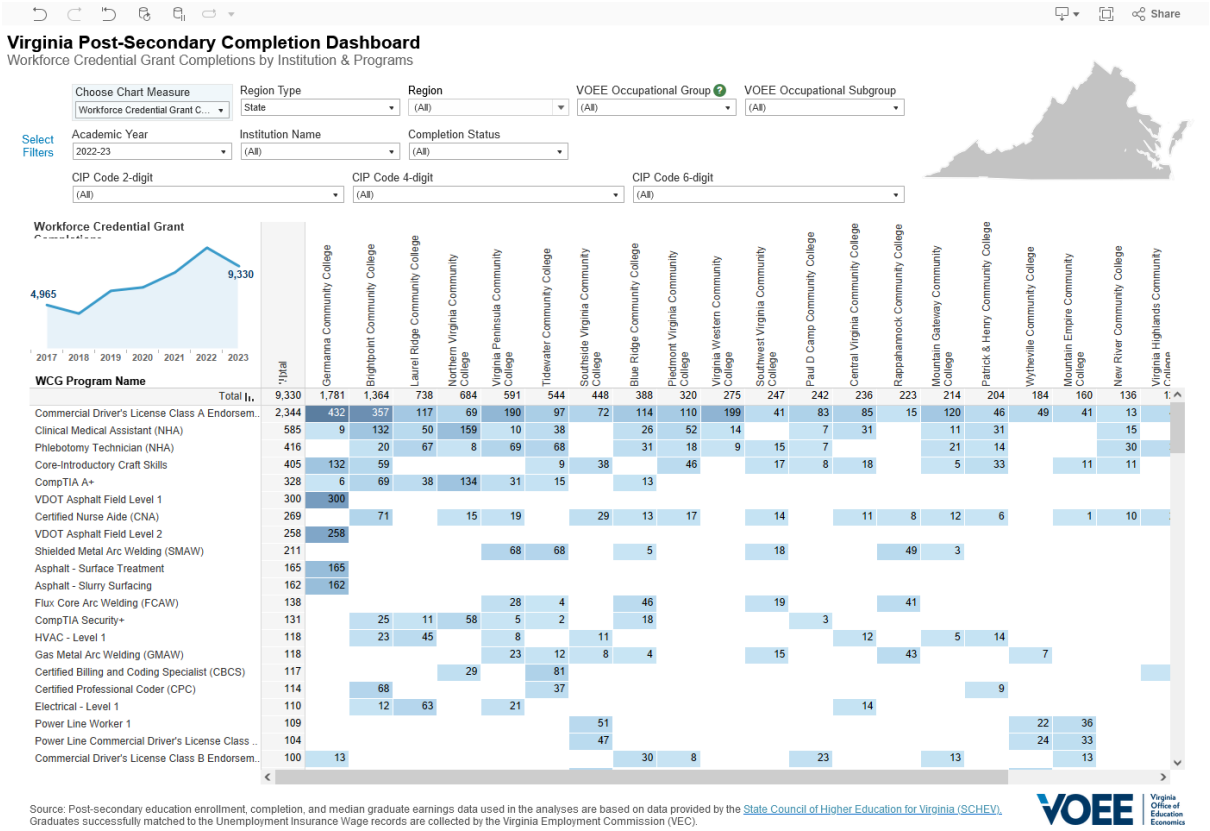
### *Virginia*

To provide resources on education and labor market alignment, the Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE) collaborates with various workforce partners, including state agencies, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), workforce development boards, and educational institutions. One such resource produced by VOEE is the Virginia Post-Secondary Completion Dashboard. This dashboard presents data on enrollment and rates of degree earning at higher education institutions across Virginia, including noncredit Workforce Credential Grant data spanning from the 2016-17 academic year to the 2022-23 academic year. This dashboard mostly pulls from SCHEV data on post-secondary elements (enrollment, completion, and median graduate earnings data).

To focus on noncredit outcomes, users can select "Workforce Credential Grant Completions" to see data on just the completers of noncredit programs eligible for the New Economy Workforce Credential/Fast Forward grants. These pay-for-performance grants provide funds for students enrolled in noncredit training that leads to certification in high-demand fields. The dashboard presents noncredit completion data, allowing users to compare activity across institutions, and to see statewide trends. Specifically, the dashboard displays a chart with the Workforce Credential Grants on the y-axis, and the institution (in this case, community college) on the x-axis. Users can compare the number of credential completions at each institution, in each type of credential to the total credentials completed at the institution, or of that type. Users can further sort by region, occupational group, institution, or CIP code. There is also a line chart displaying the total number of workforce credential grant completions in each year of the dashboard.

The Virginia Post-Secondary Completion dashboard is still a relatively new tool, having been launched in the fall of 2023, but VOEE is already considering further development of this and other resources. In the future, VOEE may integrate the Completion dashboard with other tools that they created, such as the Education and Workforce Alignment Dashboard. Inclusion of noncredit data from programs outside of the Workforce Credential Grant program is another option VOEE plans to explore.

Figure 3. Virginia Post-Secondary Completion Dashboard




## Promising Elements in a Quality Noncredit Dashboard

The dashboards produced by experts in the three focus states highlight some of the most promising elements that states may want to include in a high-quality noncredit dashboard. These elements can help make dashboards more accessible and functional for potential users – including students, legislators, employers, and educators.

### *1. Include comparative and contextualizing elements.*

The noncredit data dashboards of all three states allow users to click on different elements and compare specific subsets of data to the aggregated sets. The Iowa dashboard allows users to view different annual cohorts of noncredit students, as well as across different demographic categories and time periods. This can allow users to see change over time, which can help to identify trends. Seeing these trends can, for example, help prospective students and employers to make informed decisions about programs to enroll in or recruit from. Users can also view outcomes across different subgroups of noncredit completers, separated by program or industry type. The noncredit dashboards in Maryland and Virginia similarly allows users to see cross sections of data, separated by characteristics such as industries or institutions. This allows for easy, accessible contextualization for users.

### 2. *Include definitions of key terms.*

Noncredit data are notoriously challenging for states and institutions to collect and employ, due in no small part to the lack of consistency and standardization in the world of noncredit. There are often definitional inconsistencies for key terms pertaining to noncredit offerings between states and institutions. Given these challenges, it is important for data specialists to clearly define different elements of their datasets. For example, Maryland's noncredit dashboard has a page for technical notes, which includes definitions of key terms.

### 3. *Add labor market and education outcomes data, when available.*

Outcomes data helps prospective students to make informed decisions, institutions to identify the programs with the strongest workforce outcomes, and potential funders to see the added value of such offerings. Iowa's noncredit data dashboard presents key outcomes, such as median wages before, during, and after program enrollment, as well as employment and credit enrollment rates for students in each noncredit cohort. Maryland's noncredit data dashboard includes information about workforce course or sequence completions. Unlike many other state-level noncredit datasets, Iowa's contains information on completers as well as non-completers. Maryland is in the process of capturing and analyzing noncredit non-completers, as well. Comparing the outcomes of completers to non-completers is a key element for showing the benefits of noncredit programs and nondegree credentials.

## Key Takeaways

Though noncredit data teams in all three states had access to different types and levels of information, all were able to create attractive and useful resources for the use of their states' residents. These teams had to navigate the many challenges inherent to interpreting noncredit data, such as definitional issues, lack of pre-existing inter-agency relationships, and inadequate outcomes information, by leveraging their expertise, creative uses of preexisting datasets, strategic partnerships, and other strategies. Informative and accessible noncredit dashboards can help make the case for noncredit programs to policymakers, provide information to potential students and other stakeholders in the workforce ecosystem.

## About the Authors

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