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Education and Employment
Research Center

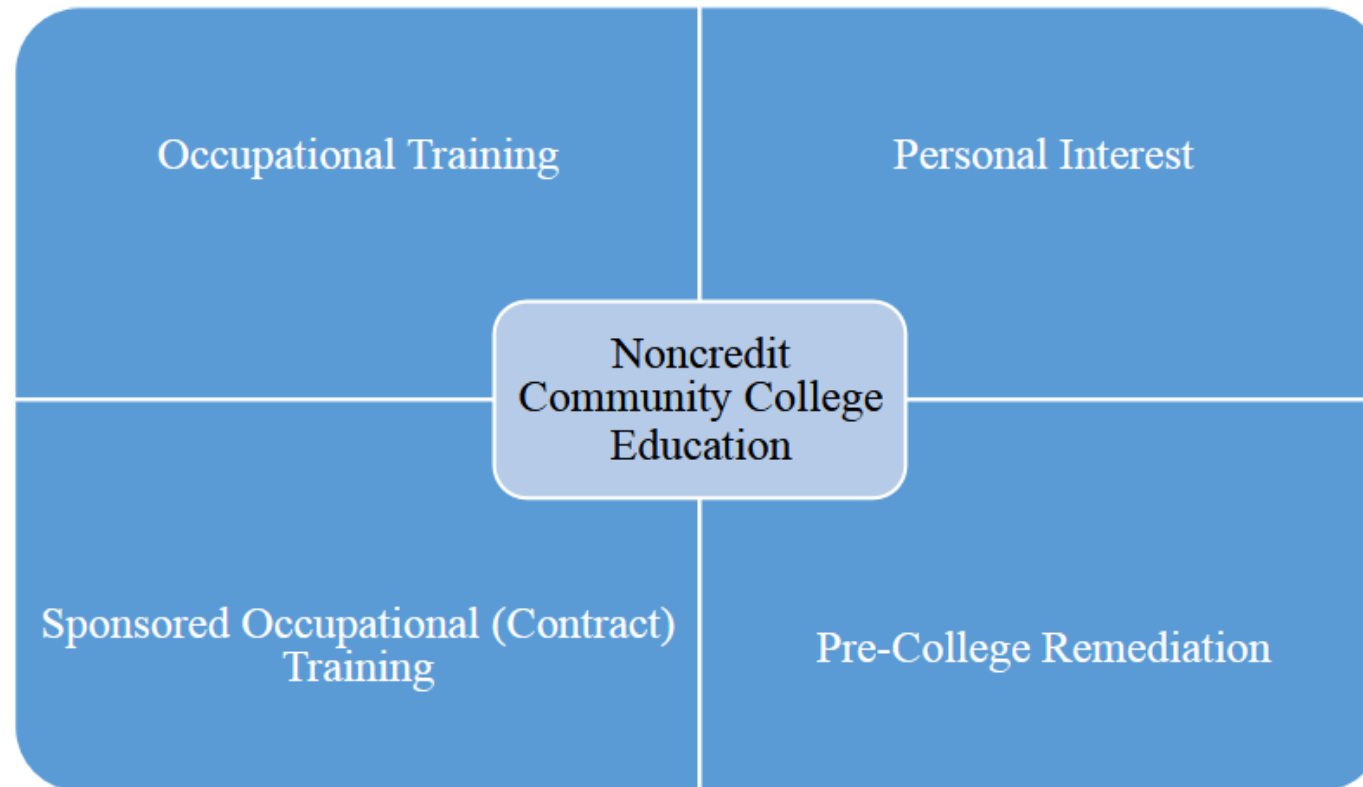
School of Management and Labor Relations

“It Definitely Opens That Door For Me”: Student Experiences in Noncredit Workforce Education at Three Community Colleges

Council for the Study of Community Colleges Conference
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Eliza Peterson, Education and Employment Research Center, Rutgers University

Background - Types of Noncredit Education



(D'Amico et al., 2014)

Background

- **Noncredit education as “hidden college”**
 - Vorhees & Milam, 2005
- **Limited data on noncredit students, though many states are making progress**
 - D’Amico et al., 2023; Van Noy et al., 2024
- **Rising interest in and funding for short-term programs, NDCs**
 - Cengage, 2022; Strada, 2020; Murphy, 2024
- **“Wild west” of higher education – imperative for quality markers**
 - Van Noy et al., 2023

Background

- **Research on noncredit students tends to be quantitative**
 - E.g. Bahr & Columbus, 2023; Bahr et al., 2022; Xu & Ran, 2020
- **Noncredit student outcomes**
 - ***Noncredit to credit transition uncommon***
 - Bahr et al, 2022; Daugherty & Anderson, 2021; Daugherty et al., 2020
 - ***Unlikely to return to college if post-program role doesn't meet expectations for quality job***
 - Dadgar et al., 2024
 - ***Modest labor market gains associated with noncredit participation, variation by program and employment field***
 - Bahr et al., 2022; Strada et al., 2019, McConville et al., 2021

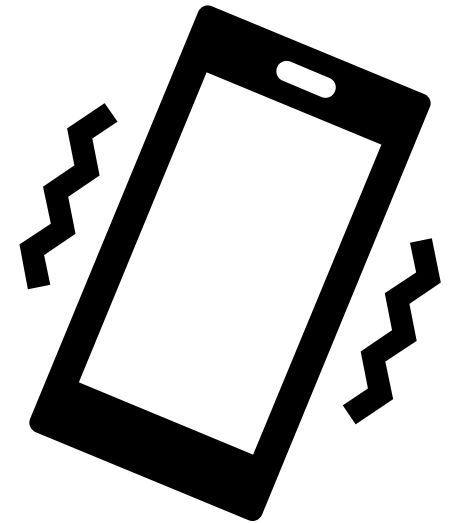
Study Details

- Prior EERC survey study of noncredit students
 - Substantial non-response rate
 - Enrollment motivations, challenges
- Funded by the Lumina Foundation
- 3 Partner Colleges
- Research Questions
 - How do students experience noncredit workforce offerings?
 - What draws students to these programs?
 - How do these programs fit into students' education and career journeys?



Methods - Challenges and Developments

- Originally...
 - Screening survey to create contact list, then scheduling via email
 - Limited survey participation, difficult to schedule
- Tweaks... mixed results
 - In-class recruitment, flyers and handouts, posting on LMS
- Most effective changes
 - Increased recruitment incentive from \$25 to \$50
 - Using peer-to-peer texting (i.e. Google Voice) to schedule interviews



Methods – Sample Identification

- Pre-interview Screening Survey
 - Students...
 - Without degrees from U.S. or other country
 - Currently or recently enrolled in noncredit workforce offerings
- Semi-structured, phenomenological Interviews
 - Via phone or Zoom
 - Rolling recruitment since June 2024-present

Institution	Number of Participants
LaGuardia	11
Mt. SAC	6
NOVA	22
TOTAL	39

Interview Sample, as of March 2025

Program Industry	Number of Students
Business	2
Education	2
Healthcare	24
IT	5
Trades and Construction	4
VESL	2

Gender	Number of Students
Female	20
Male	9
Prefer Not to Answer	10

Age Data	
Age Range	18-56
Avg. Age	32

Race/Ethnicity	Number of Students
Asian	6
White	4
Black	9
Hispanic	6
MENA	1
Multiracial	2
No Answer	10



Emerging Takeaways

- **Nonlinear enrollment pathways**
 - “Okay, so I have my CNA license, my EKG license, my phlebotomy license, my food handling license, and this license here as a central sterile technician, and then I'm going for my pharmacy tech...that's about six years of school, and I could have been a doctor already.”
 - “I went to National University. I went to InterCoast College, which I got my certificate in Family Counseling, Addiction Counseling, and I got my Medical Assisting at Northwest College.”

Emerging Takeaways

- **Appeal of noncredit workforce offerings**
 - ***Short duration***
 - “At first, I wanted to become a doctor, but then, in all honesty, that's a lot of schooling. So, I dumbbed it down. I decided that my end goal is to become a registered nurse.”
 - “If I can get some quick knowledge and get my foot in the door, I hit the ground running, but to go to school for two years or four years for a degree, I just never see the end of it, and I get impatient, and I've dropped out so many times.”
 - ***Low price***
 - “I had already been looking for something but I didn't want to take out a student loan...And [my friend] was the one that kind of like got my decision to be like, ‘okay, yeah, this is something I could do because it'd be affordable.’”

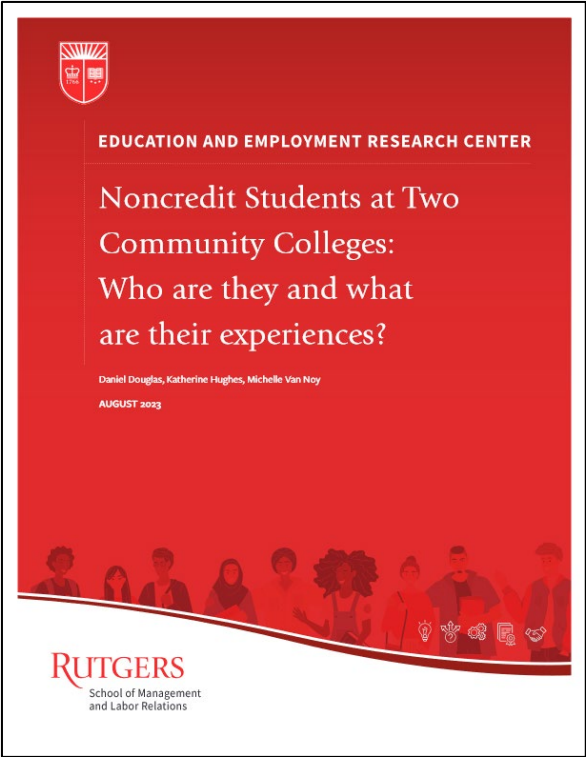
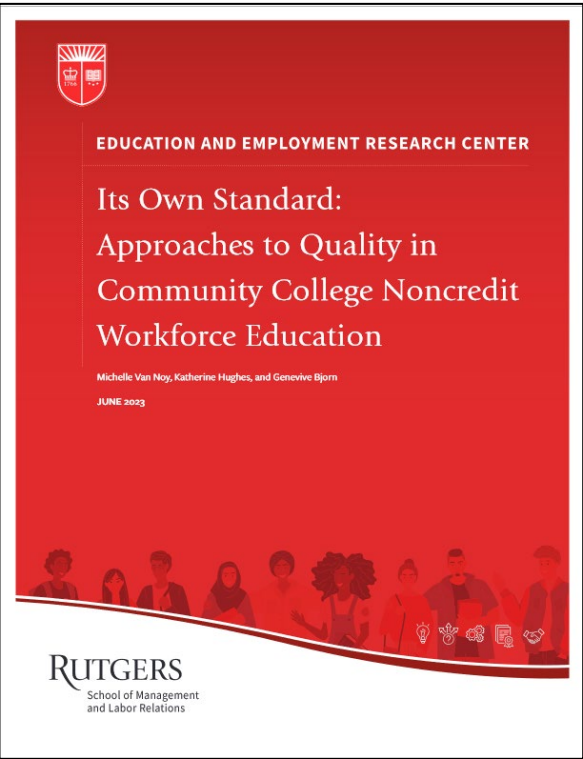
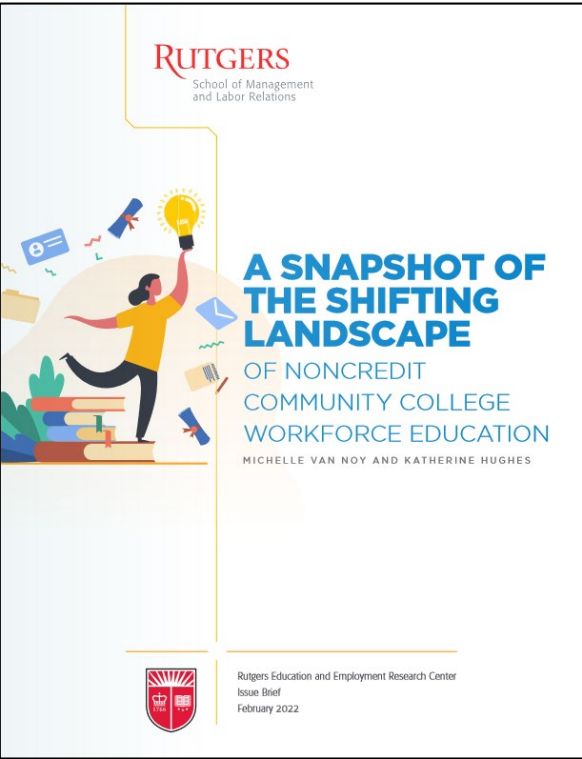
Emerging Takeaways

- **Challenges during prior schooling experiences**
 - **Disabilities**
 - “I wasn't diagnosed with ADHD until I was a real adult. I wasn't, you know, diagnosed with any of my behavioral health issues until after I had graduated high school. But, you know, looking back, it's like, okay, if I had actually been, like, going to regular therapy or talking, you know, taking medication to help with this stuff, I probably wouldn't have had it as bad [in school].”
 - “...I then went into the DeVry University, and unfortunately, I dropped out. Um, at that time that I dropped out, I was facing hearing issues.”
 - **Family life**
 - “And high school - I dropped out when I was in 10th grade because I was pregnant. And I went to Job Corps to get my GED after my son was born. And then I was just working from there on, so, school was - I wish I would have took advantage of it, you know, looking back, you know, and experienced it a different way.”

Next Steps

- Potentially developing a typology
 - “Career Explorer”, “Career Transitioner,” “Career Student” are potential groupings
- Expanding our new recruitment and scheduling strategies
 - Conducting next batch of interviews

Prior EERC Research on Noncredit WF Education



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