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Louisiana Noncredit Data Snapshot

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Project Background

Today, more than two-thirds of US adults considering further education report that they prefer a non-degree option—up from about one-half prior to the pandemic.¹ With growing interest and investment in opportunities for short-term flexible options to prepare individuals for the workforce, it is essential to cultivate a better understanding of noncredit education and non-degree credentials. Despite the importance of this information, multiple analyses have shown that only about three-quarters of states collect data on their noncredit programming.² Furthermore, state-level data collection on non-degree credentials (such as certificates, certifications, licensure, badges, and microcredentials) varies widely and is still under development in many locations.³

Because data on noncredit education are limited and vary across states, direct comparisons are difficult. This lack of rich and consistent data prevents a comprehensive understanding of noncredit education and results in inconsistent definitions, limited outcomes data, and overall data quality issues.⁴ At the most basic level, very little is known about the characteristics of noncredit programs, what they are, and what they entail—like instructional time, instructional format, requirements for entry, linkages to further education, awarding agencies, cost, and types of non-degree credentials awarded. Program-level data on noncredit offerings at community colleges will help inform ongoing measurement efforts and ensure they are more grounded in the realities of these educational offerings.

- 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. National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/pdf/NPEC/data/NPEC_Paper_Noncredit_Enrollment_and_Related_Activities.pdf; this study was funded by the US Department of Education.
- 3 Leventoff, J. (2018). *Measuring non-degree credential attainment*. National Skills Coalition. <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/measuring-non-degree-credential-attainment-a-50-state-scan/>
- 4 D'Amico, M. M. (2017). Noncredit education: Specialized programs to meet local needs. In K. B. Wilson & R. L. Garza-Mitchell (Eds.), *New directions for community colleges: No. 180. Forces shaping community college missions* (pp. 57–66). 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 shortchange the community college. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 53(4), 22–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2021.1930978>

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

- » Develop an inventory of and consistent operational definitions for state-level noncredit data elements to better understand the noncredit data infrastructure.
- » Collect and examine noncredit course/program-level data to explore noncredit offerings and their associations with enrollment rates, outcomes, instructional characteristics, and financial arrangements.
- » Uncover the drivers of noncredit offerings and produce relevant policy implications.

In addition to this analysis, the project is convening a Learning Community of states on data for noncredit education and non-degree credentials. This project seeks to lay the groundwork for common definitional language for future data collection and analysis efforts to improve the understanding of the value and quality of noncredit programs and non-degree credentials.

Methods

This report is one in a series that will explore the noncredit data infrastructure of U.S. states and present descriptive analyses of those data at the course/program level. The findings presented in these reports were reached using a multi-phased collaborative approach with leaders in partner states. The first step was to develop a robust inventory of each of the data elements potentially available at the state level. Through cross-state meetings and interviews with individual state partners, data elements were organized into a series of primary categories for analysis, including Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code and noncredit type⁵ as well as the number of contact/clock hours required⁶ and what form of non-degree credential was awarded for course/program completion⁷. We were then able to identify individual data elements within each of these categories and develop operational definitions for each one (see Table 1).

The next step was to build state-level data sets consistent with the available data on the identified and defined data elements. Because the goal was to understand what noncredit is, the unit of analysis for this project was the noncredit offering defined as a unique combination of course/program name and a college offering the course/program. Louisiana reported a total of 397 offerings across eight of the twelve community colleges in the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS). Data were not available for the noncredit offerings in the four remaining colleges. For six of the eight colleges for which data on offerings were available, the LCTCS also reported additional information about the characteristics of students enrolled in each noncredit offering.

5 D'Amico, M. M., Morgan, G. B., Robertson, S., & Houchins, C. (2014). *An exploration of noncredit community college enrollment*. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 62(3), 152–162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2014.953438>; D'Amico, M. M. (2017). Noncredit education: Specialized programs to meet local needs. In K. B. Wilson & R. L. Garza-Mitchell (Eds.), *New directions for community colleges: No. 180. Forces shaping community college missions* (pp. 57–66). Jossey-Bass. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20281>

6 National Center for Education Statistics. (2022–23). Clock hours. IPEDS Glossary. <https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/public/glossary>

7 Jacoby, T. (2021). *The indispensable institution: Taking the measure of community college workforce education*. Opportunity America. <https://opportunityamericaonline.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/10/FINAL-survey-report.pdf>

Louisiana’s Policy Context for Noncredit

Noncredit Mission and Priorities

The LCTCS consists of 12 independently accredited community colleges that deliver instruction through both credit and noncredit programs. The credit programs include both general education (e.g., English composition, college algebra, general chemistry) and career and technical education (e.g., introduction to financial accounting, medical terminology, motor vehicle service basics). Much of the credited general education and some of the credited career and technical education are transferable via articulation agreements to the Louisiana State University System, the University of Louisiana System, the Southern University System, or the postsecondary institutions of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.⁸

Noncredit education in Louisiana is evolving under the Louisiana Board of Regents’ ambitious goal, adopted in 2019, for 60 percent of adults ages 25 to 64 years to have a college degree or high-value credential by 2030. With respect to reaching this goal, the Board of Regents recognizes and counts industry-based certifications that meet a prescribed definition of a “credential of value.”⁹ In addition, the Board of Regents prescribes a definition of “on-ramp credentials” that, although not counted as high-value credentials for the purposes of calculating the state attainment rate, nevertheless offers a more complete picture of the progress being made by the state’s higher education systems toward the attainment goal.¹⁰

Funding for Noncredit Education

At present, noncredit instruction in the LCTCS receives modest state investments and is not part of the state funding formula. Historically, student participation in noncredit programs was either self-funded, with students directly paying for their own participation, or privately funded by companies contracting with LCTCS institutions to provide specific training to their employees. Students also could be funded from programmatic sources, such as WIOA, SNAP education and training, or the Louisiana Reboot Your Career grant program.

Recently, however, the state implemented the M. J. Foster Promise Program alongside and in service of the Louisiana Board of Regents’ attainment goal.¹¹ This program is funded by an annual appropriation and provides “last dollar” funding for students ages 21 and older to enroll in postsecondary programs leading to credentials in certain high-demand career and technical fields.¹² Both credit and noncredit programs are eligible for funding, and the work of the system to standardize noncredit data collection is a key aspect of ensuring and maintaining access to this substantial source of funding.

There are at least two meaningful challenges that remain to the full standardization of noncredit data collection in the LCTCS. The first challenge is the reluctance of employers contracting with the LCTCS to provide identifying information

8 <https://regents.la.gov/articulationandtransfer/>

9 <https://regents.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/PRP-VII.E.2-Quality-Postsecondary-Credentials-of-Value-Exec-Summary-Removed.pdf>

10 <https://regents.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/PRP-VII.E.2-Quality-Postsecondary-Credentials-of-Value-Exec-Summary-Removed.pdf>

11 <https://www.lctcs.edu/promise>

12 <https://regents.la.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/SB148-MJ-Foster-Promise-onepager.pdf>

on their employee participants in noncredit-based training. The absence of this individual identifying information presents an obstacle to collecting these data in the Banner student data management system. The second challenge is the use of noncredit by the colleges as a catch-all classification to record information about on-campus activities and facility usage that are not primarily instructional in nature, such as conferences or administration of standardized tests. This type of usage is not well aligned with Banner and will be shifted to another data collection platform, distinguishing it from noncredit instructional activity.

Drivers of Noncredit Data Collection

Noncredit programs in the LCTCS are administered by the academic and workforce divisions of the colleges and are almost exclusively occupational in nature, making them a key part of achieving the Board of Regents' 2030 attainment goal. The goal has contributed to a significant increase in attention to collection of noncredit program data in the last several years. In January 2020, the LCTCS began the substantial work of aligning college noncredit data collection with credit data collection, switching noncredit from a third-party platform used historically by the colleges for noncredit data collection to the Banner system that is used by the colleges for credit data collection. The LCTCS also is working closely with colleges to standardize the information submitted in data fields to ensure uniformity across colleges and over time, thereby maximizing the utility and interpretability of the data.

It is not uncommon for there to be a clear separation between the student management data systems used by community colleges and the data systems used by systems or state agencies charged with oversight of the colleges. More specifically, each college in a given system may have its own, independent student management system and associated database in which credit and noncredit data are collected and stored. Some state-mandated portion of these data may be submitted/transmitted to the system-level student management database maintained by the overseeing state agency.

In contrast, the LCTCS employs a data structure akin to a multi-entity processing system. The 12 colleges of the LCTCS and the system office share a common student management database. As a result, the system office has real-time access to all student management data that the colleges collect, which is quite different from the more familiar arrangement of a state database containing a limited subset of the student management information collected by the constituted colleges.

Historically, the LCTCS system office has purchased a license for Banner that is shared with the 12 colleges and used for collection of credit data. The system office served as the primary administrator of the credit database and, therefore, was able to ensure standardization in data collection and data elements across the system. In contrast, each institution purchased an independent license for Xenegrade for the collection of noncredit data, and each college served as the administrator of its own noncredit database, resulting in substantial variation (lack of standardization) in data collection and data elements. Moving noncredit data collection into Banner is making it possible for the system office to standardize these data for the first time. This change puts the system in a much stronger position to secure and maintain funding for noncredit programs insofar as noncredit programs serve the Louisiana Board of Regents' attainment goal.

Classifying Noncredit Offerings

Within the current project, we describe noncredit units as “offerings” because this generic term can be used to capture an array of labels applied to noncredit courses and programs across states. Louisiana often uses the term “programs,” and these can take a variety of formats and lengths depending on goal and structure. Throughout this report, we will use the terms course, program, and offering interchangeably as the unit of analysis.

Data Inventory

When embarking on the project with partner states, including Louisiana, the project team worked with state representatives to explore the data elements within state data systems. Following the development of categories and subcategories, the states developed course/program-level data sets with the available and applicable data elements.

Table 1 shows which data elements were available in Louisiana. The analysis examines if data were available on *all* (99 percent or more), *most* (67 to 98 percent), *many* (33 to 66 percent), *some* (1 to 32 percent), or *none* (less than 1 percent) of the noncredit offerings. Details regarding which demographics were not reported and where data were missing by noncredit type are presented in the Findings section that follows.

TABLE 1: State-Level Noncredit Data Inventory for the 2020–21 Academic Year in Louisiana

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES	STATE-LEVEL DATA AVAILABILITY ON NONCREDIT OFFERINGS
Field of Study	Course/program name	All
	CIP code	Most
	SOC code	Many
	Career Cluster	Most
Noncredit Type*	Occupational, sponsored, pre-college, personal interest	Most
Non-Degree Credentials	Industry certification	Many
	Occupational licensure	Some
	College-issued certificate	Many
	Micro credentials	Some
	Apprenticeship	None
Student Outcomes	Students continue to credit	Some
	Completion data availability	Most
	Pre-enrollment employment	Some
	Post-enrollment employment	Some
	Pre-enrollment salary/wage	Some
	Post-enrollment salary/wage	Some
Program Length and Admission	Number of courses if multi-course program	Some
	Total contact hours	Most
	Admission requirements	Most

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES	STATE-LEVEL DATA AVAILABILITY ON NONCREDIT OFFERINGS
Delivery	Face-to-face	Most
	Face-to-face location	Most
	Online	Many
	Blended	Some
	Competency-based	Many
	Work-based learning required	Many
	Student service availability	Many
Finance	Course/program tuition	Most
	State reimbursement	None
	WIOA-eligible training provider	Some
	Economic development incentive	Some
	Other federal grants	Some
	Other state grants	Some
	Faculty data	Most
Enrollment and Identifiers	Headcount	Many
	Race/ethnicity	Many
	Age	Many
	Sex/gender	Many
	Social Security Number	Most
	Institutional identification number	Most
	Names	Most
Birth dates	Most	

*Findings are reported by noncredit type. Though previous research has focused considerable attention on the workforce education component of noncredit, the typology employed here covers a broader landscape of noncredit offerings.

Findings

In addition to gaining a better understanding of the state-level noncredit data infrastructure, the findings below from the 2020–21 academic year represent the following key areas: (1) noncredit offerings within the key noncredit types and student enrollment in the dominant noncredit type, (2) noncredit outcomes in terms of association with noncredit type as well as availability of outcome data, (3) instructional characteristics of noncredit offerings by type, and (4) how noncredit is funded by type.

Offerings and Enrollment

Among the eight (of twelve) colleges for which data were available, occupational training represented four-fifths of all noncredit offerings (**Table 2**). Data were provided on student demographic characteristics of students enrolled in occupational offerings in six of the eight colleges. Key findings regarding demographic characteristics include the following:

- » Men were overrepresented in occupational noncredit offerings more than 2-to-1 (68% versus 30%; see **Figure 1**). There was valid (non-missing) gender information for most students (greater than 98%) who enrolled in occupational noncredit.
- » Race/ethnicity information was missing for nearly three-fifths (58%) of students enrolled in occupational noncredit (**see Figure 2**). Excluding these students, Black students accounted for just over half (51%) of enrollment in occupational noncredit, while White students accounted for 42 percent (**see Figure 3**). Most of the remaining students were Hispanic.
- » As points of comparison, 60 percent of students enrolled in credit coursework in Louisiana in 2020–21 were female, 39 percent were male, and less than 1 percent were missing information on gender. With respect to race/ethnicity, 42 percent of students in credit coursework were White, 40 percent were Black, and 6 percent were Hispanic. Only 4 percent of students in credit coursework were missing information on race/ethnicity.¹³

TABLE 2: Proportion of Noncredit Offerings across Noncredit Types in Louisiana in the 2020–21 Academic Year (8 of 12 Colleges)

NONCREDIT TYPE*	NONCREDIT OFFERINGS	
	<i>n</i>	%
Occupational Training	316	79.8
Personal Interest	14	3.5
Pre-College	0	0.0
Other	66	16.7
Total	396	100.0

*The LCTCS did not report any pre-college noncredit offerings. One offering was missing information on noncredit type and has been excluded here.

13 Figures obtained February 13, 2023, from the LCTCS system dashboard at <https://www.lctcs.edu/diversity-and-inclusion>.

FIGURE 1: Percent Enrollment by Sex in Occupational Noncredit Offerings in Louisiana (6 of 12 Colleges)

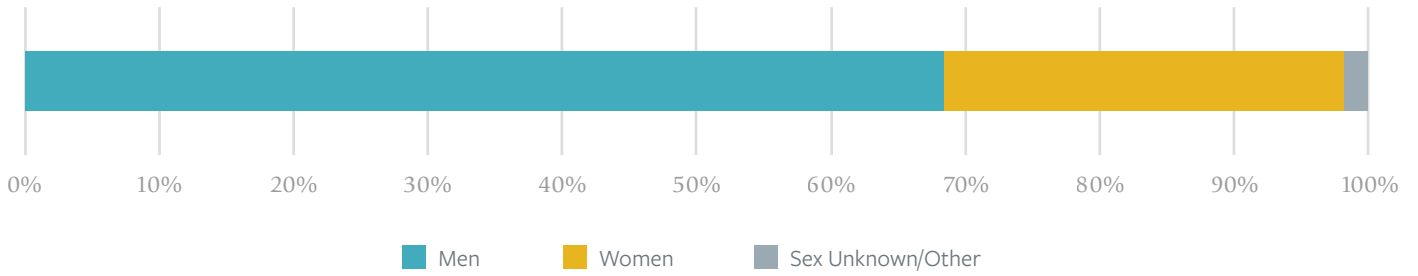


FIGURE 2: Percent Enrollment by Race (*Including Missing*) in Occupational Noncredit Offerings in Louisiana (6 of 12 Colleges)

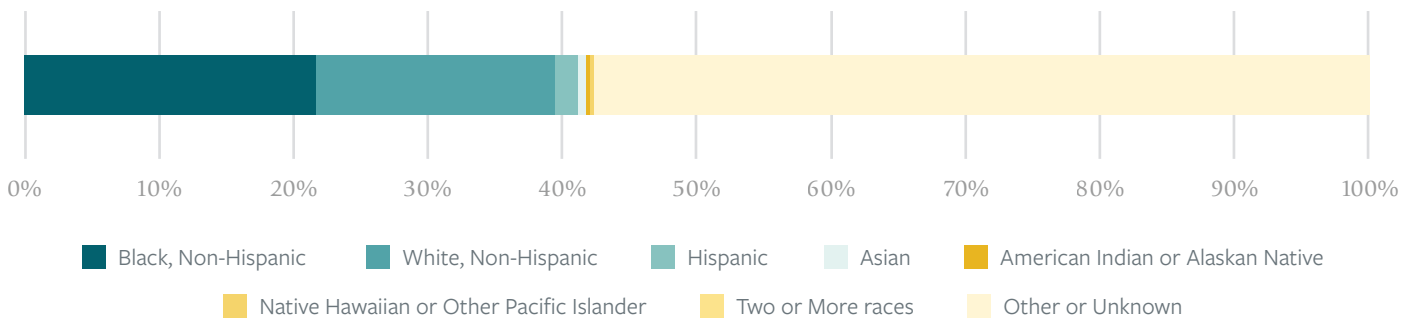
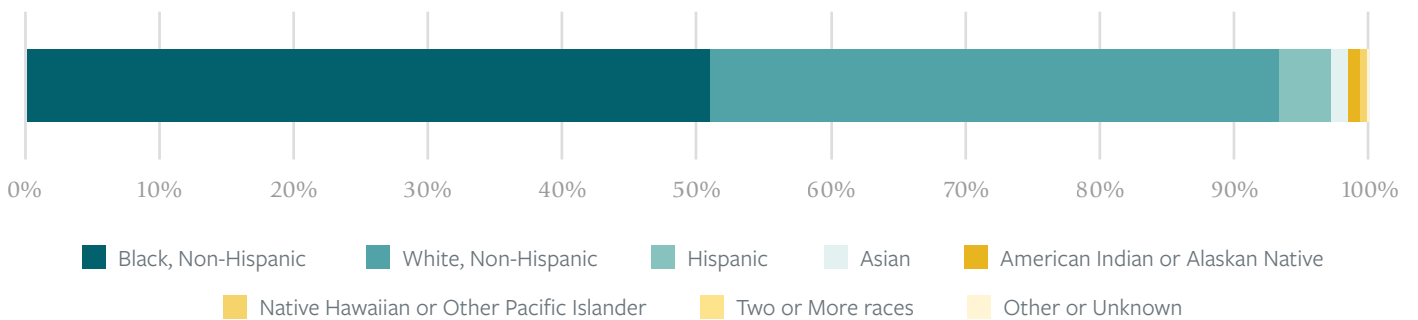


FIGURE 3: Percent Enrollment by Race (*Excluding Missing*) in Occupational Noncredit Offerings in Louisiana (6 of 12 Colleges)



Outcomes

Key findings on noncredit student outcomes in Louisiana include the following:

- » Among occupational training offerings, nearly all (93%) were associated with industry certification and three-quarters (75%) included a college-issued certificate (see Table 3).
- » As noted earlier, personal interest accounted for relatively few noncredit offerings in Louisiana. Still, a surprisingly large share of these offerings were associated with industry certification (89%) or included a college-issued certificate (56%).
- » Completion information was available for nearly all offerings, with at least 98 percent of offerings in each noncredit type having completion information. Information on labor market outcomes was rarely available, however, with no more than 10 percent of offerings in any noncredit type having labor market outcomes (see Table 4).

TABLE 3: Non-Degree Credentials by Noncredit Type in Louisiana in the 2020–21 Academic Year (8 of 12 Colleges)

NONCREDIT TYPE*	NON-DEGREE CREDENTIALS**	
	% with Industry Certification (n = 233)	% with College-Issued Certificate (n = 364)
Occupational Training	93.2	75.2
Personal Interest	88.9	55.6
Pre-College	N/A	N/A
Other (including Sponsored/Contract)	33.3	6.8

*The LCTCS did not report any pre-college noncredit offerings. One offering was missing information on noncredit type and has been excluded here.

**Percentages calculated based on number of offerings with known credentials. Of the 396 offerings with known noncredit type, industry certification was known for 233, and college-issued certificate was known for 364.

TABLE 4: Outcome Data Availability by Noncredit Type in Louisiana in the 2020–21 Academic Year (8 of 12 Colleges)

NONCREDIT TYPE*	TYPE OF COMPLETION DATA			LABOR MARKET DATA			
	% with Completion Data	% with Complete/ Not Complete	% with Pass/ Fail	% with Pre-Enrollment Employment Data	% with Post-Enrollment Employment Data	% with Pre-Enrollment Salary/ Wage Data	% with Post-Enrollment Salary/ Wage Data
Occupational Training	99	2.2	64.3	9.8	9.8	4.8	1.9
Personal Interest	100	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Pre-College	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other	98	0.0	100.0	8.1	3.0	1.5	1.5

*The LCTCS did not report any pre-college noncredit offerings. One offering was missing information on noncredit type and has been excluded here.

Instructional Characteristics

Key findings regarding the instructional characteristics of noncredit education in Louisiana include the following (**Table 5**):

- » Less than 3 percent of noncredit offerings involved multiple courses.
- » Across noncredit types, the typical (median) offering had a similar number of contact hours at 24 to 40 hours (three to five days). However, some of the occupational noncredit offerings as well as some of the offerings labeled “other” had much higher contact hours, as evidenced by the much larger means for these two noncredit types.
- » Contact hours for occupational noncredit offerings ranged from 1 to 1,080 hours. Just over one-quarter (27%) of the occupational noncredit offerings met or exceeded the minimum 150-hour threshold proposed for short-term Pell grants.
- » Most noncredit offerings are delivered face-to-face, though a large share of offerings labeled “other” also were offered in an online format.
- » Career advising (as a proxy of the availability of support services) was offered most often to students in occupational noncredit (58%) but rarely to students in other noncredit types.

TABLE 5: Instructional Characteristics by Noncredit Type in Louisiana in the 2020–21 Academic Year (8 of 12 Colleges)

NONCREDIT TYPE ¹	% of Offerings with Multi-Course Programs	Median Contact Hours ²	Mean Contact Hours ²	DELIVERY			% with Career Advising Offered to Students ²
				% Face-to-Face ²	% Blended Face-to-Face/Online ²	% Online ²	
Occupational Training	4.0	40	114	97.0	6.1	32.9	81.3
Personal Interest	0.0	30	29	100.0	0.0	28.6	14.3
Pre-College	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other	2.0	24	130	100.0	62.5	87.5	100.0

¹The LCTCS did not report any pre-college noncredit offerings. One offering was missing information on noncredit type and has been excluded here. ²Records that were missing information on this characteristic were excluded from the figures below.

Finance

Key findings on the financing of noncredit in Louisiana include the following (**Table 6**):

- » Less than 1 percent of the noncredit offerings in Louisiana were eligible for state reimbursement in 2020-2021.
- » Of the occupational offerings, 5 percent were eligible for other state grants, and 14 percent were eligible for economic developmental incentive funding. None of the offerings were reported as being eligible for both a state grant and economic development incentive.

TABLE 6: Financing Noncredit Offerings by Noncredit Type in Louisiana in the 2020–21 Academic Year (at 8 of 12 Colleges)

NONCREDIT TYPE*	% RECEIVING STATE REIMBURSEMENT	% OFFERED AS ECON DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVE	% ELIGIBLE FOR OTHER STATE GRANT
Occupational Training	0.6	14.2	4.8
Personal Interest	0.0	0.0	0.0
Pre-College	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0

*The LCTCS did not report any pre-college noncredit offerings. One offering was missing information on noncredit type and has been excluded here.

Conclusions

The Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) is deeply immersed in the work of standardizing noncredit data collection, driven forward by substantial changes in the state policy landscape and higher education funding. As such, it is an excellent case study of how a system can strengthen noncredit data collection and the obstacles that are likely to be encountered. It also is an instructive example of the importance of state policymakers in motivating and funding allocations to support the improvement of student data collection.

There are challenges that remain to be resolved in the work undertaken by the LCTCS. One is the reluctance of employer sponsors of noncredit training to share employee participant identifying information. Another is the wide array of activities—some not instructional in nature—that is recorded in noncredit student data management systems.

The LCTCS aims to grow enrollment in noncredit programs and increase matriculation from noncredit-to-credit programs to improve educational and economic opportunities for the state’s population. The solutions that the LCTCS ultimately identifies and implements will be valuable for other states to consider as they face similar challenges and adopt comparable goals.

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Rutgers’ School of Management and Labor Relations

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SMLR was originally established by an act of the New Jersey legislature in 1947 as the Institute of Management and Labor Relations. Like its counterparts created in other large industrial states at the same time, the Institute was chartered to promote new forms of labor-management cooperation following the industrial unrest that occurred at the end of World War II. It officially became a school at the flagship campus of the State University of New Jersey in New Brunswick/Piscataway in 1994. For more information, visit smlr.rutgers.edu.

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