



ISSUE BRIEF | March 2023

Virginia Community College System (VCCS) Noncredit Data Snapshot

Di Xu, Catherine Finnegan, Marina Bagreev, XunFei Li, Mark M. D'Amico, Michelle Van Noy

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

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>

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.

With support from the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES)/National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Bill & Melinda Gates 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 US states and present descriptive analyses of those data at the course/program level. The findings were reached through 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 completion.⁷ We were then able to identify individual data elements within each of these categories and develop operational definitions for each one.

The next step was the building of 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

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>

noncredit course offering instead of student-level data. In the case of Virginia, the state-level data set captured noncredit offerings under individual course sections, where a unique course section was defined as a specific course offering delivered at a specific time (such as dental assisting beginning on September 1st, 2018) at a given college (such as Northern Virginia Community College). For this report, Virginia reported 6,045 course offerings, which represent all of the course sections offered at each college during the academic year of 2020–2021.

In the data tables below, findings are reported by noncredit type. Though previous research has focused considerable attention on noncredit in relation to workforce education, the typology employed here covers the complete landscape of noncredit offerings.

VCCS's Policy Context for Noncredit

The community colleges at VCCS vary widely from one another in terms of institutional characteristics. The system comprises a mix of large and small schools as well as institutions located in rural, suburban, and urban settings.

Because the key driver for noncredit offerings is to meet the specific needs of states and local communities through this flexible format, there is great variation among course and program offerings across states and even across institutions within a state. The following sections outline some of the important policy drivers of noncredit offerings in VCCS.

Noncredit Mission and Priorities

Community college noncredit education in Virginia reflects the state's priorities, with offerings in occupational skill development leading to industry-recognized certification and other credentials, adult literacy and language development, and special interest offerings for personal enrichment, among other areas and topics that address state and local priorities.

Prior to 2016, there was limited statewide guidance on the quality and goals of noncredit courses, and many of the noncredit course offerings did not lead to a third party, industry-recognized credential. In response to the increasing demand for skilled workers to fill the available and emerging jobs in the commonwealth, the Virginia General Assembly passed House Bill 66 during the 2016 session, establishing the New Economy Workforce Grant Program (WCG). The purpose of the program is to create and sustain a supply of credentialed workers for high-demand occupations in the commonwealth (some of the most popular training programs include highway construction, certified nurse aide, welding, and commercial driver's license). Most of the noncredit career and technical education programs consist of only one course that runs for a period of six to twelve weeks that combines lectures and hands-on skill demonstrations. According to a recent report by the state,⁸ these programs tend to serve a working adult population with an average age of 36, two-thirds of whom have dependents.

Funding

Funding for noncredit courses/programs in Virginia originates from a variety of sources that are often braided together to provide comprehensive support for noncredit education. In particular, the state has dedicated several funding

8 State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. (2021). New Economy Workforce Credential Grant annual report 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.schev.edu/home/showpublisheddocument/840/637811238250130000>

sources for noncredit career technical training in high-demand fields. In many cases, prospective students enrolled in these specific workforce training programs may qualify for funding that supports the full cost for tuition, fees, supplies, and credentialing.

First of all, the WCG, implemented as the Virginia FastForward program, provides a unique pay-for-performance model for funding noncredit workforce training that leads to a credential in one of the high-demand fields identified by the Virginia Workforce Board. In this model, costs are shared among the state, the students, and the training institution, where the specific amounts of funding are based on student performance. Specifically, students eligible for WCG are required to pay only one-third of the total cost of a program upon enrollment. If the student completes the program, the state provides one-third of the cost to the training institution. In other words, the total cost would be split equally among the state, student, and institution. However, if the student does not complete the program, the student is required to pay another one-third of the total cost to the training institution whereas the state will pay zero for this training. If the student successfully completes the course and receives a third party, industry-recognized credential within six months of program completion, the state will pay two-thirds of the cost to the training institution, enabling the training institution to be reimbursed fully. One important implication of the WCG program is a mandate for the state to systematically receive data on who completes the course as well as the credential, which is not always reported on other types of noncredit courses.

The state offers financial assistance above and beyond the WCG to students who demonstrate need and are enrolled in one of the high-demand fields. If a student enrolled in a FastForward program is financially unable to pay any tuition, they may qualify for Workforce Financial Assistance (FANTIC) that will cover one-third of the cost of the program, therefore exempting the student fully from payment for the training. A number of criteria are used to determine a student's eligibility for FANTIC. One important factor is financial need. Specifically, the program requires that the student, or a dependent student's parent, has a household income no higher than 200 percent of the national federal poverty level.

The state also offers additional tuition assistance to address the unique financial needs that have arisen in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fall 2021, Virginia House Bill 2204 established the Get A Skill, Get A Job, Get Ahead (G3) program as one of its central pandemic workforce recovery strategies. G3 is a last-dollar scholarship initiative targeting low-income students in credit-bearing or noncredit workforce programs in five high-demand fields: health care; information technology and computer science; manufacturing and skilled trades; early childhood education; and public safety. Students who enroll in a qualified program and have a household income below 400 percent of the national federal poverty level may receive G3 awards that cover any remaining tuition and mandatory fees after other grant aid is applied. An award may also include a textbook stipend of \$500 for full-time attendance, \$375 for three-quarter-time, and \$250 for half-time enrollment for students in credit-bearing programs. In addition, the state also provided a one-time, \$2 million program, VA Ready, that offered a \$1,000 award to Virginia residents enrolled in one of the VA Ready-approved credential courses within the FastForward program.⁹

⁹ A number of in-demand occupations across three broad industry categories—technology, health care, and skilled trades—are eligible for the VA Ready program. The detailed list of VA Ready-approved FastForward courses can be found at <https://www.vaready.org/learn/programs/>.

In addition to the generous funding provided to its noncredit training programs in high-demand fields, VCCS also receives a funding allocation from the state to support system and college noncredit curriculum development and technology that is applicable to non-FastForward training. While the funds cannot be used to cover any student course expenses, colleges receive a portion of the funds based on FastForward registrations. Specifically, the amounts allocated to a college are calculated based on the sum of FastForward registrations from the previous fiscal year and the current fiscal year-to-date, with a minimum and maximum cap as guidelines.

Drivers of Noncredit Data Collection

VCCS has multiple drivers of noncredit data collection. First and foremost is the funding discussed above. Generally, the state requires colleges to report data on student enrollment and course completion for any noncredit course offering that receives funding mentioned above. This data collection is important for verifying enrollment and course completion directly related to the level of funding provided by the state as well as to provide avenues to communicate the impact of noncredit education on the state’s workforce development landscape. Due to these financial drivers, VCCS has established a more comprehensive and complete data system for FastForward programs than other noncredit programs in the state (see Table 1 for the main sources of data for FastForward programs in Virginia).

Table 1: Key data sources for FastForward programs at VCCS

CATEGORY	DATA SOURCE	EXAMPLE DATA ELEMENTS
Demographic information	Administrative data	gender, race/ethnicity, age
Course completion	Administrative data	course completion status
Certificate attainment	Licensure by third party	certification in commercial truck driving
Enrollment in credit-bearing program	Administrative data	enrollment in credit-bearing courses, grade, degree attainment
College enrollment and credential awarded outside of VCCS	National Student Clearinghouse data	institution name, enrollment period
Labor market outcomes	Unemployment Insurance (UI) data	quarterly earnings, industry code
Funding source	Administrative data	WCG, G3, FANTIC
Course-level features	Administrative data	course delivery format

A second driver is the building of partnerships with state agencies in Virginia to share licensure and certification data and labor market records for FastForward programs. For example, VCCS has access to unemployment insurance (UI) data provided by the Virginia Employment Commission that includes individual quarterly employment and earnings data. VCCS also has agreements with the Virginia Departments of Health and Labor & Industry for licensure data. These multiple sources of data enable the state to match their administrative data with all licensure in high-demand fields and with employment records to provide a clear connection among training, licensure, and employment.

Classifying Noncredit Offerings

Within the current project, we classify noncredit units as “offerings” because this generic term can be used to capture an array of labels used across states. Virginia uses the term “course,” which takes a variety of formats and lengths

depending on the goal and structure of the course. For the purposes of the analysis below, we used course sections (i.e., offerings) as the unit of analysis.

Data Inventory

When embarking on the project with partner states, including VCCS, 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 2 represents the availability of the existing data elements in VCCS. It is important to note that the inventory does not represent all data elements that were captured by individual institutions, but rather just those that were reported to and housed at the state level. The analysis examines if data were available on all, most, some, or none of the noncredit offerings.

Table 2: State Noncredit Data Inventory - Virginia

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	STATE-LEVEL DATA AVAILABILITY ¹⁰
Field of Study	Course name	All
	CIP codes	Most
	SOC code	None
	Career Cluster	Most
Noncredit Type	Occupational/vocational, sponsored, pre-college/basic skills, personal interest	All
Non-degree Credentials Associated with Noncredit Offering	Industry certification	Most
	Occupational licensure	Most
	College-issued certificate	Not available
	Badge	Not available
	Micro-credential	Not available
	Apprenticeship	Not available
Student Outcomes	CEU Credit and Contact Hours	Most
	Course completion	All
	Pre-enrollment employment	All offerings/not all students
	Post-enrollment employment	All offerings/not all students
	Pre-enrollment salary/wages	All offerings/not all students
	Pre-enrollment salary/wages	All offerings/not all students
Course/Program Length and Admission Requirements	Total contact hours	All
	Time of day	All
	Admission requirements	Not Available

¹⁰ “Most” means more than two-thirds of offerings and “many” indicates more than one-third but fewer than two-thirds of offerings.

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	STATE-LEVEL DATA AVAILABILITY ¹⁰
Delivery	Face-to-face	All
	Face-to-face location (campus/industry site)	All
	Online	All
	Blended	All
	Competency-based	Many
	Work-based learning required	None
	Student service availability (academic/career advising)	Many
Faculty	FT credit/noncredit faculty	All
	FT noncredit faculty	All
	PT/adjunct	All
Finance	Course/program tuition	All
	Tuition paid by student	All
	Tuition paid by employer	All
State/Government Funding	State reimbursement	Most
	WIOA-eligible training provider	Most
	Other grant funds (including federal, state, or institutional sources)	Most
	Economic development incentive	Not available
Enrollment and Identifiers	Headcount	All
	Race/ethnicity	All offerings/not all students
	Age	All offerings/not all students
	Sex/gender	All offerings/not all students
	Social Security Number	All offerings/not all students
	Institutional identifier	Most
	Names	Most
	Birthdates	Most
	Other ID	None

Findings

In addition to gaining a better understanding of the state-level noncredit data infrastructure, the findings below from the 2020–2021 academic year represent the following key areas: (1) noncredit offerings and enrollment within the key noncredit types, (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.

Acknowledging the importance of FastForward offerings in terms of its high priority within the VCCS as well as the associated funding and data availability, Tables 3–6 below display findings for FastForward separate from other occupational training offered in the community colleges.

Offerings and Enrollment

Key findings on noncredit offerings and enrollment include the following:

- » Occupational training represented around 80 percent of all noncredit offerings and enrollments in VCCS (Table 3).
- » Females represented higher enrollments in noncredit education overall (54% vs. 39%), as well as in each specific type of noncredit education (e.g., occupational training, pre-college), with the largest gender gap in pre-college (66% vs. 28%) (Figure 2).
- » When removing those for whom sex/gender data were missing, females comprised 58 percent of noncredit enrollments. By comparison, females comprised 57 percent of for-credit community college students in Virginia, thus showing near equal representation.
- » The strong focus on occupational training among noncredit enrollees was consistent in each gender and racial subgroup (Figures 1 & 3).
- » Approximately 7 percent of noncredit enrollees in 2020–2021 did not have a reported sex/gender in the state data system, and more than two-thirds had missing values for race on average (Figures 2 & 4). The level of missingness for race was especially high for pre-college, where more than 90 percent of the enrollees were missing race information. There are many potential reasons for missingness, including a simplified admission process for noncredit training that might not require students to report demographics and contract training designed for employers who may not provide demographics for all participants.
- » With the majority of enrollments not having a specified race in the system, it is difficult to draw conclusions on enrollment patterns. However, for those records including race, the enrollments seemed to be somewhat similar to credit enrollments in the VCCS, where 70 percent of credit enrollees were White, 15 percent Black, 7 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent Asian.

Table 3: Noncredit Offerings by Course and Headcount Enrollment by Noncredit Type

NONCREDIT TYPE	COURSES		2020-21 HEADCOUNT ENROLLMENT		
	N	%	N	%	
Occupational/ Vocational	Non-FastForward Programs	2,952	48.8	19,385	47.3
	FastForward Programs	2,006	33.2	12,314	30.1
Sponsored/ Contract		783	13.0	7,265	17.7
Pre-college		187	3.1	1,383	3.4
Personal Interest		117	1.9	621	1.5
Total		6,045	100	40,968	100.0

Figure 1: Percent Enrollment in Noncredit Types by Sex

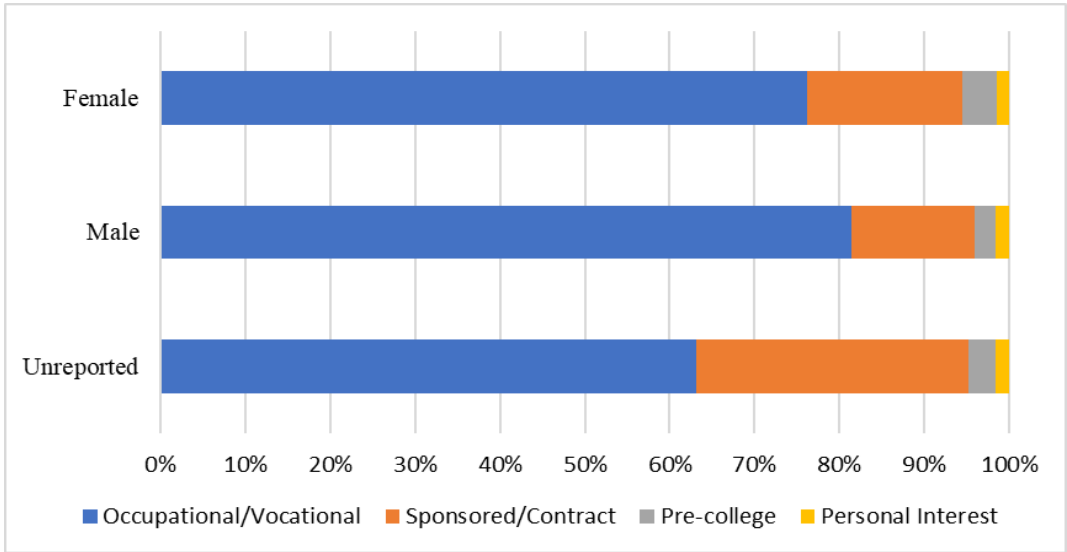


Figure 2: Percent Enrollment by Sex within Noncredit Types

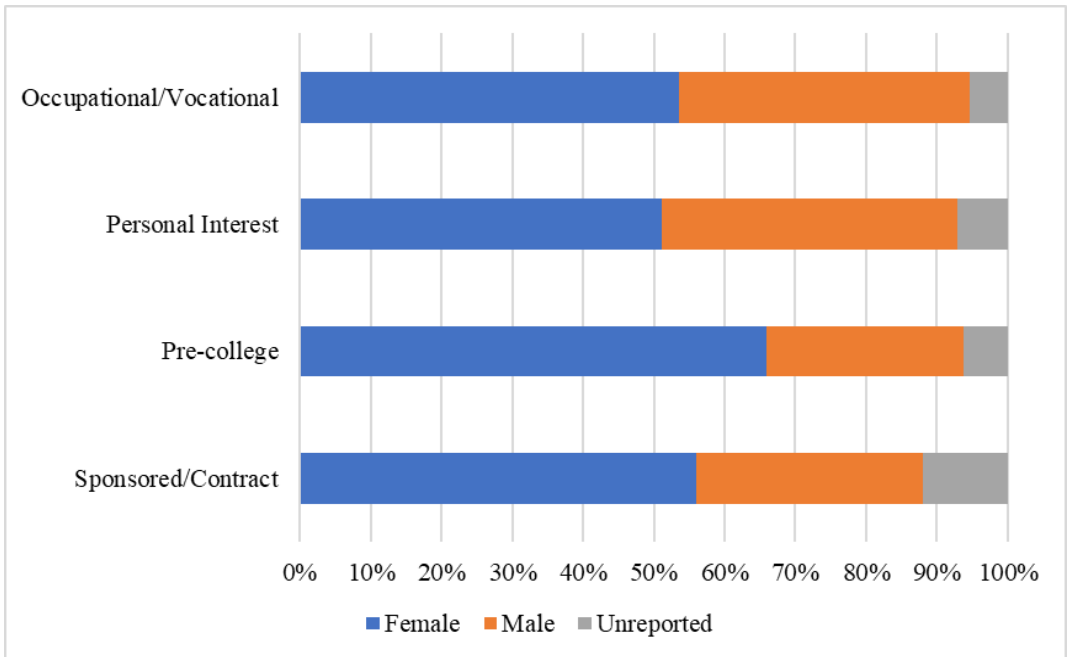


Figure 3: Percent Enrollment in Noncredit Types by Race

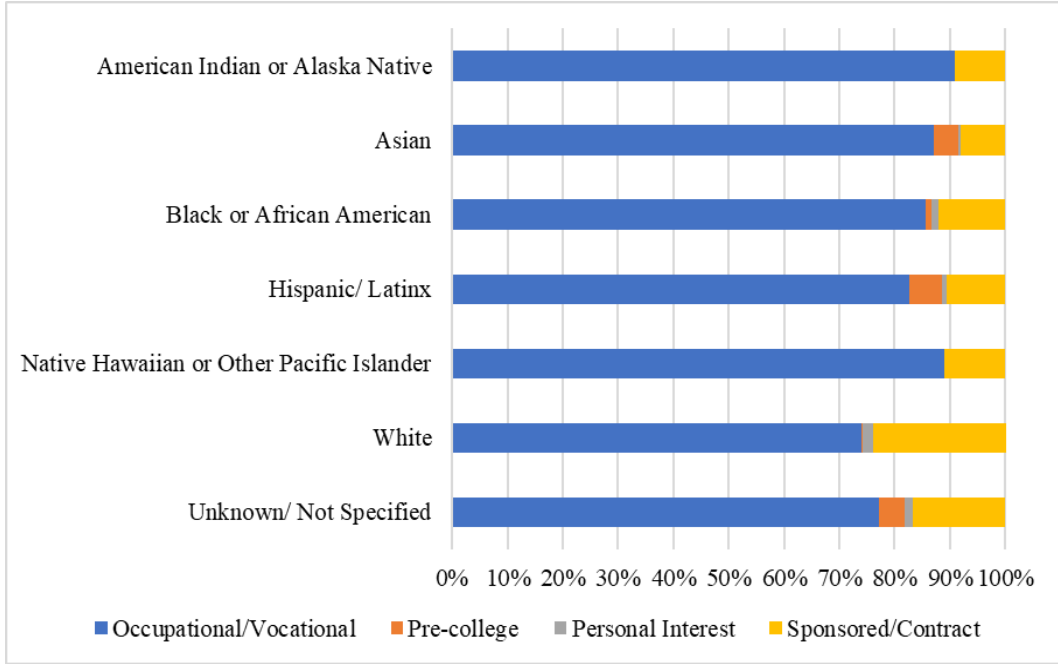
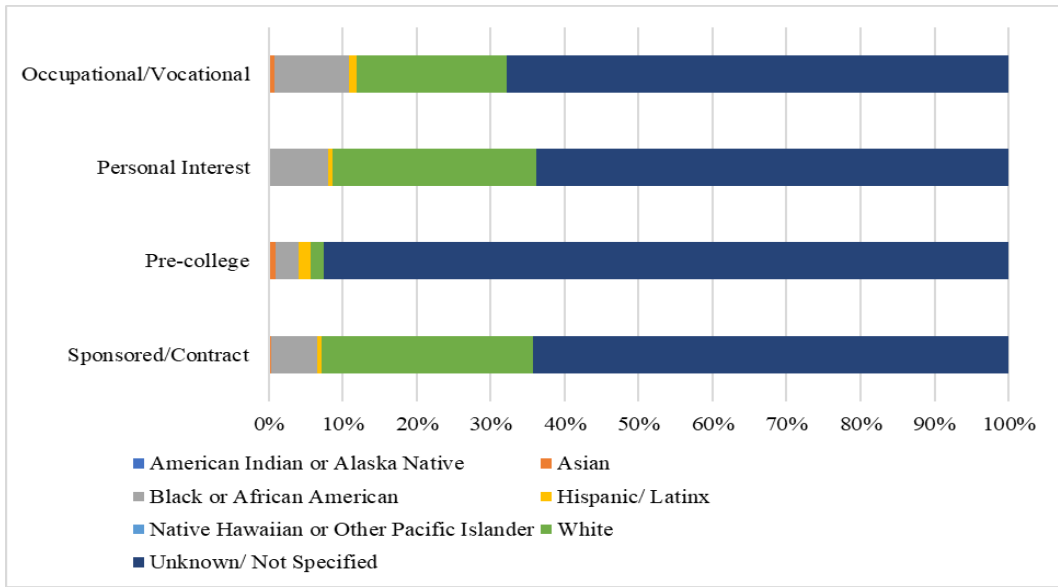


Figure 4: Percent Enrollment by Race within Noncredit Types



Outcomes

Key findings on outcomes include the following:

- » The majority of noncredit offerings did not lead to any credential. However, given the performance-based funding formula for FastForward programs, where part of the funding is contingent on receiving industry-recognized credentials, all of the FastForward programs were associated with industry certificates.
- » More specifically, around one-third of the noncredit course offerings were FastForward programs and therefore had an industry certification associated with them (Table 4).
- » Data availability on outcomes was consistent across noncredit types, with course completion and labor market data available on all offerings (Table 5). However, it is important to note that labor market data were retrieved from the UI Agency in Virginia based on students' Social Security Numbers (SSNs). Accordingly, students who did not provide their SSN, were self-employed, worked in other states, or worked for the federal government would be missing from the UI database.

Table 4: Non-Degree Credentials by Noncredit Type

	COURSES		
	NONCREDIT TYPE	N	% ASSOCIATED WITH AN INDUSTRY CERTIFICATE
Occupational/Vocational	Non-FastForward Programs	2952	0
	FastForward Programs	2006	100
Pre-college		187	0
Personal Interest		117	0
Sponsored/Contract		783	N/A

Table 5: Outcomes Data Availability by Noncredit Type

NONCREDIT TYPES	LABOR MARKET DATA				
	% with Course Completion Data	% with Pre-Enrollment Employment Data	% with Pre-Enrollment Earnings Data	% with Post-Enrollment Employment Data	% with Post-Enrollment Earnings Data
Occupational Training: FastForward (n=2,006)	100	100	100	100	100
Occupational Training: Non-FastForward Programs (n=2,952)	100	100	100	100	100
Personal Interest (n=117)	100	100	100	100	100
Pre-College (n=187)	100	100	100	100	100
Sponsored/Contract (n=783)	100	100	100	100	100

Instructional Characteristics

Key findings on instructional characteristics include the following (Table 6):

- » The noncredit offerings with the highest number of contact hours were FastForward programs, followed by pre-college.
- » The majority of noncredit offerings were delivered face-to-face, with varying numbers being delivered online. While online instruction was offered less frequently than face-to-face in all cases, it was most prevalent in non-FastForward occupational/vocational training and least common in FastForward programs.
- » Average contact hours for occupational noncredit offerings ranged from 35 for non-FastForward courses to 112 for FastForward courses. Out of the 4,958 occupational noncredit offerings, 16 percent (780 offerings) met the minimum 150-hour threshold being considered for proposed short-term Pell grants. Furthermore, 32 percent (633 offerings) of FastForward courses met the minimum 150-hour threshold being considered for proposed short-term Pell grants.

Table 6: Instructional Characteristics by Noncredit Type

NONCREDIT TYPE		COURSES		CONTACT HOURS		DELIVERY		
		N	%	Median	Mean	Face-to-Face %	Online %	Blended %
Occupational/ Vocational	Non-FastForward Programs	2,952	48.8	15	35	61	34.9	4.2
	FastForward Programs	2,006	33.2	100	112	91.9	2.7	5.4
Sponsored/Contract		783	13	6	39	81.1	18.5	0.4
Pre-college		187	3.1	50	87	96.3	3.7	.
Personal Interest		117	1.9	6	9	65	34.2	0.9
Total		6,045	100	24	62	75	21.1	3.9

Finance

Key findings on finance include the following:

- » All of the FastForward course offerings, which comprised one-third of VCCS' noncredit course offerings, received stable and generous funding from the state through WCG. WCG used a pay-for-performance model that provided reimbursement to training institutions based on course completions and credential attainment.
- » WCG also covered part of the tuition for students enrolled in these courses, where students only needed to pay one-third of the cost if they completed the course; the average cost of the FastForward training to a student (reflecting one-third of the tuition) was \$766 in the fiscal year of 2021, with noticeable variations across fields of study (Table 7).

- » Students enrolled in FastForward programs were eligible for additional funding through other state funding sources, such as FANTIC or G3, based on individual financial need and the specific program enrolled, making the cost even lower for some individuals.
- » In addition to funds dedicated to FastForward training, colleges also received a lump sum of general state funds, allocated by formula based on the number of individuals served by noncredit activities, to cover operational costs associated with noncredit education (as opposed to payment for specific courses or programs), such as curriculum development and technology in both FastForward and non-FastForward training.

Table 7: Data on FastForward Course Enrollment, Average Cost to Students, and Average State Payments

OCCUPATIONAL FIELD	ENROLLED	COMPLETED TRAINING	REPORTED A CREDENTIAL ATTAINED	AVERAGE COST TO STUDENT*	TOTAL STATE PAYMENTS FOR TRAINING AND CREDENTIAL COMPLETION*	AVERAGE STATE PAYMENTS PER CREDENTIAL ATTAINED
Computer and Mathematical	829	823	214	\$691	\$706,267	\$3,300
Construction and Extraction	1,912	1,883	1,531	\$284	\$997,427	\$651
Education, Training and Library	99	94	90	\$1,330	\$244,720	\$2,719
Health Care Practitioners and Technical	444	408	163	\$563	\$324,601	\$1,991
Health care Support	1,137	1,098	805	\$861	\$1,637,991	\$2,035
Installation, Maintenance and Repair	821	800	617	\$843	\$1,244,107	\$2,016
Office and Administrative Support	587	538	383	\$849	\$777,904	\$2,031
Production	1,089	1,078	851	\$573	\$1,104,411	\$1,298
Transportation and Material Moving	1,986	1,869	1,497	\$1,274	\$4,327,647	\$2,891
All	8,904	8,591	6,151	\$766	\$11,365,075	\$1,848

Table source: State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (2022). *New Economy Workforce Credential Grant FY2021 Annual report*

*Average costs per student are based on the charges of one-third of the cost of the program if the student completed training.

Conclusions

As the project team works with the partners of individual states to learn about noncredit offerings and the noncredit data infrastructure, there are several conclusions and lessons learned specific to the findings from Virginia and the corresponding state context:

- » Virginia’s robust noncredit data collection is closely tied to the significant levels of state support for noncredit training programs, especially occupational training in high-demand fields through its FastForward programs. Ultimately, funding requires data collection to verify enrollments, course completion outcomes, and credential attainment, which results in a fairly complete and comprehensive data system.
- » That said, there is still room for further improvement in data collection, such as missing data for some key variables. For example, approximately 14 percent of students enrolled in FastForward programs still have missing values for race and ethnicity, which is noticeably larger than the missing rate for the same variable in the credit-bearing sector at VCCS (which is typically below 5%). More universal reporting of course demographic composition could provide valuable insights on student population served, performance gaps between subgroups of students, and best practices to address student needs.
- » Gaining additional insights on the instructional characteristics of a course (e.g., work-based learning) and more nuanced information about the certification tests (e.g., cost of a specific test, whether a student participated in the test, and test scores) could prove useful for understanding what infrastructure is in place or absent in a specific program, as well as identifying specific factors that contribute to higher course completion and credential attainment rates.
- » Compared with FastForward programs, data collection for other noncredit programs (including occupational training outside of FastForward programs) is less systematic. As a result, important program-level information, such as state reimbursement, is less complete or not available for these programs. However, Virginia embraces the idea that the data infrastructure should grow over time, so it is possible that this inquiry may lead to insights that could expand future data collection in the noncredit sector.
- » As Congress considers Short-Term Pell Grants for offerings as short as 150 hours/8 weeks, capturing an understanding of how Virginia funds various noncredit offerings perceived as having value to the state offers insights into the necessary guardrails that will have to be considered to approve courses eligible for federal student aid.

Following the state-specific explorations, including this one on Virginia, the project team is moving toward a cross-state analysis and the development of a noncredit data taxonomy to help guide states as they seek to expand noncredit data collection and gain a better understanding of the impact of their noncredit offerings.

About the Authors

Di Xu is an associate professor of educational policy and social context at the University of California Irvine.

Catherine Finnegan is the assistant vice chancellor for institutional effectiveness at the Virginia Community College System.

Marina Bagreev is a research analyst at the Virginia Community College System.

XunFei Li is a doctoral candidate in the department of educational policy and social context at the University of California Irvine.

Mark D'Amico is a professor of higher education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Michelle Van Noy is the director of the Education and Employment Research Center at the Rutgers School of Labor and Management Relations.

The Education and Employment Research Center

Rutgers' Education and Employment Research Center (EERC) is housed within the School of Management and Labor Relations. EERC conducts research and evaluation on programs and policies at the intersection of education and employment. Our work strives to improve policy and practice so that institutions may provide educational programs and pathways that ensure individuals obtain the education needed for success in the workplace, and employers have a skilled workforce to meet their human resource needs. For more information on our mission and current research, visit smlr.rutgers.edu/eerc.

EERC Areas of Focus

Community College
Innovation



Student Choices
and Pathways



STEM and Technician
Education



Noncredit Education and
Non-Degree Credentials



Education and Labor
Market Connections



Rutgers' School of Management and Labor Relations

Rutgers' School of Management and Labor Relations (SMLR) is the leading source of expertise on the world of work, building effective and sustainable organizations, and the changing employment relationship. The school is comprised of two departments—one focused on all aspects of strategic human resource management and the other dedicated to the social science specialties related to labor studies and employment relations. In addition, SMLR provides many continuing education and certificate programs taught by world-class researchers and expert practitioners.

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.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics within the National Science Foundation for their financial support. At EERC, Tracy Cangiano skillfully provided research support through various phases of the project, and Angel Butts of The Word Angel, LLC provided excellent editorial assistance. The authors are solely responsible for any errors.

