A MORE UNIFIED COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

Strategies and Resources to Align Non-Credit and Credit Programs

2020

ESG | Education Strategy Group

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community colleges are an important provider of the skilled workforce essential to so many of America's employers. However, college programs are not always structured in ways that best prepare students for the workforce. Most institutions offer non-credit workforce programs and credit-based programs that operate separately. Many employers primarily value the skills and competencies built within those programs and may not focus on the distinctions between these programs. Students value access, flexibility, and opportunity to reach their educational goals. While it may largely go unnoticed, the bifurcation across non-credit programs and credit programs is impacting both students and employers.

Despite operating within the same institution, distinctions between non-credit programs and credit programs in structure, educational approach, faculty, and student resources compound to make programs feel worlds apart. While there are reasons for the separation of programs and some distinctions are in fact beneficial, other differences are simply default or arbitrary. And so, the two systems often exist separately, causing potential content duplication, lack of communication, and missed opportunities to collaborate and build pathways.

Students enrolled in these programs are particularly impacted. Students in non-credit programs do not often have a direct pathway to continue their education on the credit side toward a degree. They are unlikely to receive credit for the learning that occurred in their non-credit program and unlikely to have access to financial aid or other means of funding for their education. The student experience in non-credit workforce programs is inequitable to that of students in credit programs in terms of their access to services, visibility, and representation across the institution.

Institutions must turn their attention to these inequities and disconnects. Now is the time to create a more unified community college that **aligns industry-focused non-credit programs to credit programs that lead to degrees.** The economic and health crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic heightens the urgency for such change. The needs of today's students and workforce demand such change. To be clear, non-credit can cover a wide range of offerings, but the focus of alignment should be on workforce programs.

A new framework for alignment is needed. This framework offers five key tenets, all of which must be implemented to realize a more unified community college.This framework is based on research, evidence in the field, and conversations with institutional, system, and policy leaders. Framework tenets include:

1. **Treat all students as students.** Make the student experience across non-credit and credit programs more equitable. Address structural inequities that disadvantage students in non-credit programs over those in credit programs. Begin to think of students in non-credit programs and students in credit programs as two parts of the whole, which must be considered together. Ensure every institutional decision or action with student implications includes consideration of students in non-credit programs. Remove labels attributed to students in non-credit programs.

2. **Build clear pathways between non-credit and credit credentials.** No program should be an educational dead end. Make non-credit program completion for credentials of value a seamless transition to an associate's degree program. For students in degree programs, incorporate non-credit certificates or certifications into the program. Non-credit programs continue to thrive and employers benefit from the resulting cohesion. Pathways are made clear through prominent communications and strong advising.

3. **Align departments and governance.** Establish strong coordination across non-credit and credit departments. Consider organizing relevant non-credit and credit programs into the same department or establishing joint leadership. Be prepared to modify the institution's overall curriculum development and design process to achieve alignment.

4. **Make programs credit-worthy or credit-based.** Ensure that learning in industry-focused non-credit programs counts for credit. Credit-worthy programs award credit for learning when students transition into credit programs through the use of bridge tools, such as credit matrices, articulation agreements, or equivalency agreements. Credit-based programs go through the process to become accredited, while maintaining labor-market orientation, putting students on a direct pathway to an associate's degree.

5. **Remove barriers to transition.** Make transitioning easy for students by reducing the number of forms and processes required to transition, providing navigational assistance, and similar course schedules across programs. Make transitioning as automatic as possible. Make transitioning facilitated and incentivized by providing scholarships or other funding.

All components of this new framework require significant organizational, operational, and policy modifications. Implementing the framework requires time and commitment necessary to address shifts in organizational culture.

Starting points offer different ways to build toward the new framework. Case studies and additional examples represent existing efforts. At the time of this report, no single institution or system has completely implemented the new framework or achieved full alignment. Yet, those who are doing this work are leaders in the field, demonstrating the need for further alignment and showing how change in this area is both possible and essential.

Starting points include:

Removing the Structural Divide. Institutions create a new or merged division to encompass non-credit and credit programs and facilitate pathway development. See case study on the new division of Teaching, Learning, and Student Success at Prince George's Community College.

Developing Bridge Tools to Award Credit. Institutions use bridge tools to develop pathways from non-credit programs into credit programs and to award credit when students transition to credit programs. See case study on equivalency agreements at Salt Lake Community College.

Making Industry-Focused Programs Credit-Based. Institutions pursue accreditation for the majority of industry-focused non-credit programs to make them credit-based. See case study on non-credit programs becoming credit-based at the Kentucky Community and Technical College System.

Reorienting for Demand-Driven Pathways. Institutions rethink the delivery and function of non-credit training to address the current and future needs of employers and the broader community in a way that is adaptive, partnership-based, and data-infused. See case study on re-envisioning workforce development at Monroe Community College.

Getting Started Guides offer tangible steps to begin alignment, with accompanying templates and samples.

Guides are oriented around three core principles: **be student-centric, be labor market-driven, and build for innovation.**

The **GETTING STARTED GUIDE FOR INSTITUTIONS AND SYSTEMS** includes:
1. Choose a starting point.
2. Articulate the vision.
3. Engage stakeholders.
4. Tackle the elephant in the room – culture.
5. Understand the data.
6. Align student services and administrative operations.
7. Identify initial pathways.
8. Make it known.

The **GETTING STARTED GUIDE FOR STATES** includes:
1. Connect to other state priorities.
2. Create the enabling conditions.
3. Develop statewide tools for alignment.
4. Incentivize with funding.
5. Provide financial aid and other supports to students.
6. Change policy to address barriers.
7. Employ legislation if needed.
8. Institute accountability

The **GETTING STARTED GUIDE FOR ADMINISTRATORS, FACULTY, AND STAFF** includes:
1. Start where you are.
2. Be a voice for students.
3. Make connections.
4. Create alignment in your area.
5. Collect and share data.
6. Promote pathways.

Creating pathways to align non-credit and credit programs opens the doors of opportunity to students, faculty, employers, and the regional economy. Now is the time for community colleges to effect this change.

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges have long held dual missions of preparing workers in their local communities and preparing students for transfer to bachelor's degree programs at four-year institutions. However, as community colleges developed, these two missions diverged into separate tracks, with one focusing on non-credit workforce training, and the other focusing on degrees and transfer. This has led to a bifurcated institutional structure that does not equitably serve and prepare all students for workforce opportunities and career advancement.

Nationally, nearly 14 million adults—eight percent of the U.S. population—have an industry-based certification or a non-credit or credit certificate.[1] Nearly 16 million adults—nine percent of the population—hold an associate's degree.[2] These credentials and degrees are often the result of separate systems that rarely intersect, sending the bulk of the 14 million adults and 16 million adults off in different directions, even though both groups may be educated by the same institutions: community colleges.

Most postsecondary systems are not designed to guide non-credit workforce credential holders to pursue an associate's degree. Students in these programs do not often have a direct pathway to continue their education on the degree side. If they do continue, their prior learning is not likely to count toward a degree and they may even have to repeat courses they received in their non-credit program. Similarly, students in degree programs do not often interface with non-credit credential programs or know about available certificates and training that may be relevant and advantageous to their career goals.

And so, the two systems remain distinct and siloed, despite being relevant to each other and to students. While some of these distinctions are beneficial, some were simply defaulted into over time and have persisted. This has led to inequity in the opportunity students have to continue their education, build on what they have already learned, and gain credit for what they have achieved. It has led to a lack of faculty and administrator communication, coordination, and planning, both internally and externally with industry partners. It has led to duplication, redundancies, and inefficiencies across the institution, with students bearing the greatest cost.

There is a need to change these realities. All students should have the option to pursue a degree, the pathway to achieve it, and the security of knowing that the education in which they started will count toward their next educational credential. Aligning non-credit credentials with credit programs leading to degrees would benefit both students and institutions. If students in non-credit credential programs were encouraged and supported in pursuing a degree program upon completion of their certificate or certification program, they could improve their lifetime earnings, potential for promotion, social and economic mobility, and competitiveness in the

marketplace. Students in degree programs could enhance their competencies and competitive edge by pursuing certificates and certifications. Institutions would benefit from students in non-credit certificate and certification programs transitioning into degree programs by gaining additional tuition revenue and public funding.

There is a way to bring about change. Some colleges and systems are taking steps to initiate alignment; but, more work is needed. There is an opportunity to go further by implementing a new framework for alignment that holistically addresses the disconnects in the current siloed system.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

This report focuses on building pathways between non-credit credential programs and credit programs leading to an associate's degree in community colleges.

Pathways are defined as having a clear route with identified steps facilitating the transition between non-credit and credit programs.

While each institution uses its own language and definitions for these programs, it is common to more broadly mark the distinction between these programs as "non credit" and "credit." The challenge in this approach is that it reinforces divisions between these programs that are often arbitrary and not related to their value. However, in the absence of preferred alternative language, this report will use the following terms:

Non-credit programs will refer to industry-focused technical training programs that lead to a certificate or certification of value.

Credit programs will refer to programs leading to an associate's or applied associate's degree regardless of whether the credits are offered through non-credit or academic departments. This is inclusive of standalone credit-bearing workforce credentials nested within degree programs.

Developing new terminology should be an explicit focus of the field in its effort to move toward a more unified structure.

THE NON-CREDIT AND CREDIT PROGRAM DIVIDE

To understand the need for improved alignment and pathways, it is first important to understand the differences across non-credit and credit systems and the implication of those differences on colleges and their students.

PROGRAMMATIC DIFFERENCES

Structure. Many non-credit programs provide shorter-term training, whereas credit programs are more likely to be (though not exclusively) a year or longer in length. The length of a non-credit program can range from a single course or training, a series of time-limited grant-funded programs, one-time or ongoing employer contract programs, and longstanding training programs. Unlike their credit counterparts, non-credit programs are not tied to the academic calendar, and can start at any time, based on employer and student demand. They are structured by clock hours rather than seat time and credit hours, which adhere to accreditation standards and therefore have a more rigid process to follow in order to launch. As such, non-credit programs provide more flexibility and practicality for adults trying to balance other responsibilities.

Credit Designation. There is no set standard for determining whether a program is offered as non-credit or credit. Each institution determines which programs will count for credit toward degrees and which will not. A program may be offered one way or the other based on an employer request, faculty preference, institutional capacity, funding incentives, or structural factors. This designation means entirely different approaches to creating syllabi, hiring faculty, course/program approval processes and terminology for learning objectives, outcomes and assessments across non-credit and credit. These distinctions may cause dissonance or a sense of incompatibility, real or perceived, between non-credit and credit programs.

Value Determination. The value or perceived value of non-credit programs, when compared to credit programs, is often called into question. While there is not a single determination of value that non-credit programs offer, one clear way to signal that programs are industry aligned and high quality is through culminating in credentials of value. A credential of value is any credential that leads to employment in a high-skill occupation with a family-sustaining wage.[3] In the ideal scenario, these credentials of value have been identified at the state or regional level with input from K–12, higher education, and workforce stakeholders. (See Education Strategy Group's 2020 report, Building Credential Currency for more information.) Credit programs, in contrast, do not have to grapple with or prove value in the way that non-credit programs must. Quality is assumed, as general perception holds that individuals with associate's degrees on average enjoy higher wages and more opportunity for career advancement.

One of the most severe implications of these programmatic differences is duplication of courses and programs across non-credit and credit. Non-credit programs may offer a course or program that is an exact duplication of the same course on the credit side, with the only differences being that the structure, schedule, and tuition model follows the approach of the non-credit department. Alternatively, non-credit programs may have an offering that is similar, though not an exact duplicate, as what is being offered on the credit side. The only difference may be that the non-credit offering bundles several courses into a single program that often includes more time for practice and application and is more practical and skills-oriented, while the credit offering breaks up the program into multiple courses that fit the credit-hour model and may be more theoretical and less applied. This duplication can lead to confusion and frustration among students, as well as employers who receive outreach from faculty on both sides. It can leave employers unsure of how best to connect with institutions and how to optimally create the employee pipelines they need.

STAKEHOLDER DIFFERENCES

Students and Student Experiences. Students in non-credit programs are substantively different from students in credit programs. They are more likely to be low-income, as their higher-income peers tend to pursue degree programs over non-credit programs.[4] They are more likely to be older, with the average age of students in non-credit programs being 34 compared to 22 for students in credit programs, more likely to have a GED rather than a high school diploma, and more likely to be students of color.[5] For instance, Black students comprise 26 percent of all students in non-credit programs, as opposed to 24 percent in credit programs, and Hispanic students comprise 16 percent of students in non-credit programs, as opposed to 4 percent in credit programs.[6] Further, the student experience across programs varies considerably. Students in non-credit programs do not receive access to the same level of resources and support services that students in credit programs receive. This could include access to health services, career services, tutoring, counseling services, and more.

Faculty and Staff. Faculty in non-credit programs often come from industry. They are hired for their technical experience and expertise. Faculty in credit programs are also hired for subject matter expertise; however, there is emphasis on having the necessary postsecondary credential that is required for accreditation. Faculty

in non-credit programs are likely to be paid less than faculty in credit programs, receive fewer benefits, and have less opportunity for career advancement. Faculty in credit programs are more likely to be treated as professionals, with more autonomy to shape the curriculum in their programs. Faculty in non-credit programs often work very closely with employer partners to determine the curriculum.

The different treatment and experience of students, faculty, and staff in non-credit programs has led to both a real and perceived stratification among stakeholders at community colleges. For students, the differences in resources and services may simply seem like more streamlined approaches targeted to students who are eager to get into the workforce. In actuality, they are structural inequities built into the policies, systems, and procedures of the postsecondary sector at large. Such inequities have the net result of hindering access and opportunities for specific student populations. For faculty and staff, stratification has led to a perceived hierarchy between non-credit and credit stakeholders. This hierarchy has shaped the culture and interactions of faculty across non-credit and credit programs, making collaboration and communication more challenging. These perceptions impact the willingness of faculty to learn from each other across programs. As such, faculty across non-credit and credit programs often function independently of one another, reinforcing the development of policies and processes that do not take into account the needs or context of students across both non-credit and credit programs.

OPERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Funding and Financial Aid. Non-credit programs are funded quite differently than credit programs. In many cases, they do not receive the same level of state support as their credit program counterparts, and therefore must support themselves through tuition revenue, corporate training revenue, and grants. As most non-credit programs are either not eligible for financial aid or not set up to receive financial aid, students in non-credit programs are more likely to bear the full cost of their program in contrast to students in credit programs, which are more heavily subsidized by state and local funding. While federal financial aid is available for some non-credit programs, most colleges do not offer it because of the complexities of simultaneously reporting clock-hour and credit-hour Title IV aid to the U.S. Department of Education. If expanded, short-term Pell, which provides federal Pell grants to certain training and certification programs, would have the potential to significantly increase access to, ideally, quality non-credit experiences for more students.

Student Services. Very rarely are student services shared across non-credit and credit programs. Admission in non-credit programs may be a much more streamlined process than its credit counterpart, as students may not need to provide high school transcripts, take an academic placement test, complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), or provide a range of information that credit programs are required or seek to collect. To that end, advising in non-credit programs is more often done by faculty rather than student advisors. Advisors in credit programs often are not familiar with non-credit programs and the same is true of advisors in non-credit programs. Students in non-credit programs do not typically receive student IDs or pay student fees, so may not have access to student centers, libraries, gyms, and other important services.

Technology. In the same way that student services differ between non-credit and credit programs, back office functions and operations also differ. A major difference centers around software and technology. Platforms for registration systems, student information systems (SIS), and learning management systems (LMS) differ across non-credit and credit programs as the structures, offerings, and needs across these programs differ. A non-credit registration system may use open terms year-round and clock hours, while a credit program registration system uses a semester or quarter schedule and credit hours. A non-credit SIS likely will not require nearly as much personally identifiable data and demographic data as a credit program SIS, which must adhere to system, state, and federal data requirements. In most instances, non-credit and credit data systems do not effectively interface with one another.

The emergence of two separate systems for operating has not only created inefficiencies for back-office functions, but also put up unnecessary barriers for students seeking to transition between non-credit and credit programs. With different processes and systems in place, institutions that seek alignment or visibility of students across programs often struggle with policies, practices, platforms, and softwares that do not align. The result? A certificate or certification in a non-credit program may not lead to or count toward an associate's degree in the same institution, causing students who go from the non-credit to credit programs to repeat the same or similar learning on the credit side. An associate's degree program may not provide the option of a critical industry certification. Students bear the brunt of this division by not being able to easily see and actualize the steps needed to pursue additional education.

A CALL FOR CHANGE

Now is the time to rethink the divisions between non-credit and credit offerings. Now is the time to effect changes that will position community colleges in the long term to be both nimble and future-oriented, ensuring that learners can begin with one educational goal of skills acquisition, training, or certification and either continue toward a degree program or additional credential or return at a later point to further their learning. Institutions must turn their attention to the inequities and misalignment of this divided system. They must do this to better serve students, their communities, and the economy.

Students deserve more. Non-credit certificates and certifications provide important access to a given sector or industry; however, these credentials should not be the end goal. The data show that continuing from a non-credit certificate program into a degree program may offer the potential for higher earnings, promotion, and competitiveness in the marketplace.[7] Yet while many students in non-credit programs may wish to transition and further their education, the percentage who actually progress to degree programs is low.[8] This may be due to the lack of advising or lack of clear, visible, and supported pathways through which students are incentivized to continue along, either immediately following the completion of a non-credit certificate or at a later date. It may also be due to students in non-credit programs not seeing the immediate value of continuing or not being able to immediately continue, so aiming instead for employment.

Without an easy way to continue from a non-credit program into a credit program, students in non-credit programs are less likely to continue toward an associate's degree. A study of stackable credential programs—a sequence of credentials that build toward a career pathway—in California found that only 15 percent of such programs had a clear pathway between credentials; however, for the programs with clear pathways, students were more likely to continue to the next credential compared to those in programs without clear pathways, at a rate of 16 percentage points higher.[9] Further, research has found that students who utilize stackable credentials are most likely to do so at the same institution, pointing to the benefit to colleges of creating pathways within and across an institution.[10]

The economy demands more. Employers need a talent pipeline and often look to community colleges to provide that pipeline. They value flexibility in education and training that allow individuals to develop skills as they are needed throughout a career and may appreciate the opportunity for more accelerated offerings. Employers' preferences are playing out in hiring practices, as more emphasis is put on in-demand competencies and skills, both hard and soft, of prospective hires.[11] This phenomenon demands a more unified approach to skill development among education and training providers that more thoughtfully marries technical and human skill acquisition.

Furthermore, technological innovation and automation, which are leading to new jobs that require new knowledge and skills, reinforce the importance of lifelong learning opportunities and skills. Many institutions are adapting to provide students with 21st century skills, but the divided non-credit and credit model hinders an institution's ability to build a strong industry-focused pipeline from introductory skills to certificate/certification to associate's degrees and beyond.[12] This pertains to students coming out of both non-credit and degree programs. Institutions must be willing to adapt, to reconsider the current structure, and implement changes that fully prepare all students to succeed in the workforce.

The current situation requires more. In this COVID-19 era and beyond, institutions have to rapidly shift to upskill, reskill, and accelerate unemployed learners to jobs and careers. The situation provides an opportunity for institutions to rethink their structures and approach and begin to position themselves in the long term to be both nimble and future oriented. Meanwhile, this urgency for pragmatic reskilling is occurring at a moment when state and institutional budgets are constrained; increasing scarcity of resources is a driver and catalyst for change. Such efforts are more easily and efficiently accomplished if institutions do not have to work across two systems. Acting now will position community colleges to remain an essential education and training provider for the community and region and prepare for longer term adaptability beyond the COVID era needs. Sufficient public funding will be critical for community colleges to respond in this way.

Additionally, the U.S. is experiencing renewed civil rights engagement and greater attention to the influence of historical and systemic racism on our policies and institutions. This context has made it even more clear that opportunity gaps for students by race and income directly impact educational attainment. Such gaps are felt most by students of color. Black students make up the greatest population in certificate programs, yet, they are the group most likely to end their education at that level, rather than pursue additional education.[13] Perhaps more troublingly, due to the effects of racial and social injustice, students of color are also the least likely to complete any level of postsecondary credential and do not enjoy comparable economic gains when they do complete the credential.[14] Developing pathways from non-credit to credit programs and making it easier for students to further their education can directly contribute to reducing equity gaps and addressing the detrimental effects of racism on society.

A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR NON-CREDIT AND CREDIT PROGRAM ALIGNMENT

1 TREAT ALL STUDENTS AS STUDENTS

2 BUILD PATHWAYS BETWEEN NON-CREDIT & CREDIT CREDENTIALS
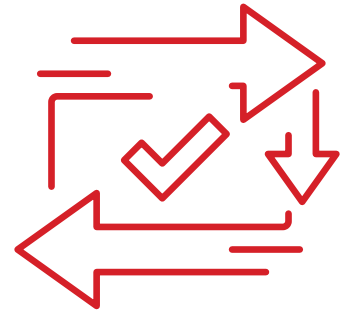
3 ALIGN DEPARTMENTS & GOVERNANCE

4 MAKE PROGRAMS CREDIT-WORTHY OR CREDIT-BASED
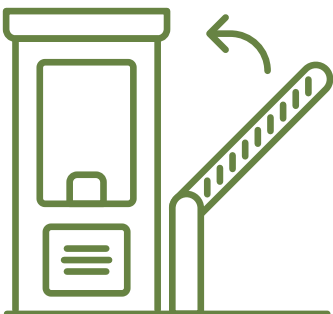
5 REMOVE BARRIERS TO TRANSITION

A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR ALIGNMENT

A more unified community college can be achieved, but it requires a new framework to guide institutions as they address the many barriers of this bifurcated system. It demands a new way of thinking about alignment. This framework offers five key tenets to achieve alignment, all of which must be implemented in order to realize this vision.

1. TREAT ALL STUDENTS AS STUDENTS.

Make the student experience across non-credit and credit programs more equitable. Address structural inequities that disadvantage students in non-credit programs over those in credit programs, such as lack of student services, funding or financial aid, or access to other supports such as the computer lab and counseling services. Embed student equity across non-credit and credit programs permanently through policies, systems, and procedures.

Begin to think of students in non-credit programs and students in credit programs as two parts of the whole, which must be considered together. Ensure every institutional decision or action with student implications includes consideration of students in non-credit programs. Make all student data on progress, transition, and outcomes visible and central to planning across the institution.

Remove labels attributed to students in non-credit programs. Students in credit programs are often called "students" while students in non-credit programs are called "non-credit students." Barbara Denman, Dean of Business, Health, and Public Service, at Prince George's Community College put it best when she noted, "Nobody wants to be called a 'non' anything."

2. BUILD PATHWAYS BETWEEN NON-CREDIT AND CREDIT CREDENTIALS.

No program should be an educational dead end. All students should know the next step or option in their educational journey. Make non-credit certificate completion a default on-ramp to a degree program. Incorporate non-credit certificates into credit programs leading to a degree.

Make pathways clear and visible through prominent communications and strong advising. For the pathways to be effective, faculty and staff must promote them to students and employers and believe in their value. Institutions also must prioritize pathway development and promotion as part of their commitment to student equity in opportunity and outcomes. Students, institutions, and stakeholders will benefit from the resulting cohesion.

Pathways should also be built to optimally serve today's adult students. President Jay Box of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System suggested that strong pathways also include a "freeway approach." This consists of on-ramps and off-ramps, expecting students to achieve a non-credit credential, gain employment, and return at a later point for a degree.

3. ALIGN DEPARTMENTS AND GOVERNANCE.

Establish strong coordination across non-credit and credit departments. Consider organizing relevant non-credit and credit programs into the same department or establishing joint leadership, such as Prince George's Community College has done, to improve alignment. Internal organizational alignment is essential for pathways to be successful.

Be prepared to modify the institution's overall curriculum development and design process to achieve alignment. Address programmatic duplication that causes barriers for students or complications to faculty collaboration. Educate faculty and staff on the importance of this work. Bring faculty together across non-credit and credit departments for professional development on how to implement and sustain alignment. Institute processes to enable participatory governance and coordination in new program development, instruction, strategic planning, and industry outreach.

This alignment will be one of the most challenging, yet critical parts of the work. Every student-serving office and every administrative office, from admissions and the registrar to financial aid and student advising, from institutional research to information technology, will be impacted by alignment policies and procedures. Promote equity by ensuring key stakeholders from non-credit and credit departments are at the table when decisions are being made.

4. MAKE PROGRAMS CREDIT-WORTHY OR CREDIT-BASED.

Ensure that learning in industry-focused non-credit programs counts for credit. This is the bridge that forms the pathway between non-credit and credit programs. Select the option, between credit-worthy and credit-based, according to the needs of students.

Credit-worthy programs award credit for learning when students transition into credit programs. Bridge tools such as credit matrices, articulation agreements, or equivalency agreements are used to determine the credit award. Institutions put the onus on themselves to align content, learning objectives, and outcomes to make programs credit-worthy, rather than on students to prove through additional assessments that their learning is credit-worthy. Salt Lake Community College spent two terms aligning their non-credit competency-based education (CBE) courses in their Diesel Systems Technology program to credit-bearing courses so students would be able to directly receive credit for their learning.

Alternatively, non-credit programs can become credit-based by making the necessary modifications to gain accreditation. The Kentucky Community and Technical College System followed this model and found that while the initial process of gaining accreditation took time, once it was achieved, it became much easier to develop new credit-based workforce courses and programs and align them to degree programs. The credit-based workforce courses are listed on transcripts, students are already on a pathway leading to a degree, and access to financial aid may be available.

5. REMOVE BARRIERS TO TRANSITION.

Make transitioning easy for students. Reduce the number of forms and processes required to transition. Providing navigational assistance. Have similar course schedules across programs.

Make transition as automatic as possible so that students who complete a non-credit certificate can be directly admitted into the relevant credit programs. Do this by aligning learning objectives and outcomes. Consider how to best embed or address literacy and numeracy skill development in a way that facilitates the transition.

Make transitioning possible and incentivized. Provide scholarships or other funding at scale for all students. Train faculty and advisors. Set aside marketing resources to promote student transition. Work with employers and alumni to encourage workers to return to the institution to continue their education. Make this a standard expectation and ensure success by facilitating the process and providing support along the way.

Implementing this framework will not be easy. It will require transformational leadership at all levels to enact the vision. There will need to be strong coordination and collaboration among stakeholders, particularly faculty and staff, to implement the changes. It will require an understanding of policies and processes, a commitment to outcomes and accountability, and a reprioritization of resources. Cultural norms must be identified and modified. External stakeholders, such as employers and states, will need to support and prioritize the work.

STARTING POINTS TO IMPLEMENT THE NEW FRAMEWORK FOR ALIGNMENT

Each institution and system has their own unique context and culture within which they operate. Therefore, *there is not one singular way to embark on implementing the new framework for alignment.* This section offers four starting points to begin implementation:

- **Removing the structural divide**
- **Developing bridge tools to award credit**
- **Making industry-focused programs credit-based**
- **Reorienting for demand-driven pathways**

Each starting point exemplifies a different motivation, organizing factor, and method of implementation. A case study for each provides insight into how specific institutions and systems have pursued alignment. Additional examples show supporting efforts.

At the time of this report, no single institution or system has fully implemented the new framework or achieved full alignment. Those who have begun the work have not yet reached outcomes of students moving from non-credit credential to degrees and vice versa at scale. However, these 14 institutions, systems, and states are boldly and innovatively leading the way for the rest of the field. They are demonstrating the need and urgency for alignment and showing how change in this area is both possible and essential.

The difference in starting points acknowledges that what makes sense for how one institution or system begins to pursue alignment may not work for another. Although these examples are categorized into separate approaches, they all address various elements of the new framework for alignment in part.

REMOVING THE STRUCTURAL DIVIDE

APPROACH:
Create a new or merged division to encompass non-credit and credit departments. Facilitate pathway development and student progression between non-credit certificate and degree programs. Act as one unit through coordination, communication, and collaboration.

TOOLS:
Focus on the policies, procedures, systems, software, job descriptions, administrative functions, and supporting infrastructure required to align non-credit and credit departments.

TIPS:
Transformational leadership is essential to guide change.

CASE STUDY: THE NEW DIVISION OF TEACHING, LEARNING, AND STUDENT SUCCESS AT PRINCE GEORGE'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Location/ Type:
Largo, MD; Large suburban

Student Enrollment by Program:
Non-credit*: 18,000
Credit: 12,000

Student Age by Program:
Non-credit: 72% 25 and older
Credit: 60% 24 or younger

Student Ethnicity by Program:
Non-credit: 49% African-American, 22% Latino, 3% Asian, 0% Native American, 9% White
Credit: 71% African-American, 12% Latino, 4% Asian, 0% Native American, 4% White

Accreditation:
Middle States Commission of Higher Education

From College Navigator and MD Community College Databook (https://mdacc.org/wp-content/uploads/1-Enrollment_r2.pdf)
From PGCC IR Office
* non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

Background

In 2018, Prince George's Community College (PGCC) created a new division called *Teaching, Learning, and Student Success*. This originated through the president's vision, which prioritized competitiveness and agility in the marketplace over historical institutional structures. These efforts built upon the college's participation in guided pathways, a national initiative to create program pathways mapped to careers and to support student progression on those pathways. The new division sought to foster a mindset across the college that "all education is workforce education," as Clayton Railey, the executive vice president and provost overseeing the new division, shared.

Structural Alignment

The *Teaching, Learning, and Student Success* division brought together credit programs, non-credit programs, and student services. Guided pathways provided the initial impetus for alignment, while the prioritization of agility in the marketplace drove a deeper and broader approach to alignment efforts. Additionally, PGCC realized that the distinctions between non-credit and credit programs led to inequitable opportunities for students.

"We set up silos that had an unintended consequence that made it difficult for students to continue on the path," shared Christine Barrow, Dean of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. While non-credit and credit programs remained distinct, they restructured themselves to improve coordination across all facets of the departments. Administrators and faculty sought to remove programmatic duplication across non-credit and credit programs, such as in culinary arts. Faculty from non-credit and credit programs began working together to analyze labor market data, plan new offerings, launch them in non-credit programs, and expand them to credit programs. Faculty and curriculum are shared across programs. "It's a true partnership," noted Michael Smith, Department Chair, Technology, Engineering, and Construction.

PGCC had to address policy and operations at all levels to effect this alignment, which has been an enormous undertaking. The effort included examining how they collect data, how they register students, and how they structure position descriptions to incorporate alignment. *"We did not anticipate how this effort would affect every business function and process at the college, including those which we did not initially consider related to the effort,"* remarked Railey. Their work in this area is an ongoing process.

Pathway Development

Pathway development began informally at the departmental level. For instance, students in credit programs are encouraged, but not required, to pursue relevant industry certificates. Students in pharmacy, biology, and chemistry degree programs take the pharmacy technician non-credit credential to gain work experience and a competitive edge. Likewise, students in non-credit programs are encouraged to take certain modules in credit courses to enhance their theoretical understanding. Approximately 70 percent of IT courses are cross-listed in non-credit and credit programs, enabling students from both programs to take courses together.

With no pre-existing connections between many of the non-credit and credit programs, PGCC uses credit by exam, a type of prior learning assessment (PLA) through which students take a test to determine how much credit they will receive for their learning, as the bridge tool to initiate more formal pathways. They plan to expand on their stackable credential model as an improved pathway. PGCC also expects to formally embed non-credit modules or certificates into degree programs as a future step.

Credit Determination

Credit by exam was chosen to determine credit-worthiness and award credit since the majority of programs retained their non-credit and credit distinctions and since courses were different between these programs. PGCC developed a credit matrix to show the potential credit award based on the exam. (Note: While PLA is often used as a bridge tool in community colleges to award credit, it does place the onus on students to prove credit-worthiness.) Additionally, a model for course articulation to credit, rather than PLA, exists at PGCC through their high school career and technical education (CTE) programs and could potentially serve as an example or framework of how to switch from credit by exam to articulation agreements.

Student Equity

PGCC is taking a student-centric and equity-minded approach in their work. "The equity rationale is something that everyone really connects to," reflected Yvette Snowden, Associate Vice President Workforce Development and Continuing Education. Although student services have not yet been integrated across non-credit and credit programs, students in non-credit programs have been given student IDs, which gives them access to resources such as the computer lab, printing services, the library, and the gym. Additionally, PGCC sought to remove the "credit" and "non-credit" labels on students. *"All students must mean everyone,"* commented Barbar Denman, Dean of Business, Health, and Public Service. There is more to do, such as improving advising across programs and improving their ability to better see student progression and completion patterns across programs.

Results and Next Steps

While it is too early in the initiative to have outcomes on students continuing from non-credit to credit programs, PGCC has seen initial gains. For example, cross-listing courses across non-credit and credit programs resulted in increased demand by students in credit programs, leading to more course sections. Similarly, faculty in non-credit programs experienced gains as they were able to offer more courses through the cross-listing than they could have on their own. With industry partners, they were able to eliminate the unnecessary duplication of separate clinical agreements and separate advisory boards across non-credit and credit programs.

PGCC is continuing to put the structures in place to radically re-envision their approach to serving students. *"We have an opportunity to do something together that is new...building together as an integrated team from the ground up,"* noted Barrow. In addition, PGCC is launching a new center, called Business Solutions, that will optimize their ability to innovate and respond quickly to industry needs through a consultative approach.

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES

THE EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING UNIT AT THE LOUISIANA COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

System:
Manages 13 public two-year colleges across Louisiana

Student Enrollment:
161,600

Accreditation:
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

From Guidry, L. (2019, Sept 8). "With one year to go, here's where LCTCS stands with its six-year 'audacious' goal" The Daily Advertiser.
https://www.theadvertiser.com/story/news/local/education/2019/09/18/louisiana-community-technical-college-lctcs-stands-its-six-year-audacious-goals/2312918001/

Last year, the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) brought together non-credit and credit programs into a single unit at the system office. The merger was supposed to be a temporary move to cover an open staff position; however, leadership quickly saw the benefit of the integrated unit, made the merger permanent, and began to move forward with intentionality in removing the structural divide. They added adult education and named the unit, Education and Training.

The goal of the new unit was to eliminate silos and duplication and improve efficiency. A first step was to reorient responsibilities in the unit around subject matter expertise. This meant, for instance, that the staff member overseeing health programs would oversee them for all health non-credit, credit, and adult education programs, as opposed to having one staff member oversee health programs in non-credit programs and another staff member oversee health programs in credit programs. LCTCS is exploring programming format changes, such as year-round offerings and eight-week courses to better align to student and industry needs. René Cintrón, Chief Education and Training Officer for LCTCS noted that, "academic programs have flexibility to learn from workforce programs and workforce programs have structure to learn from academics. The answer is somewhere in the middle."

LCTCS infused transparency in their work to spur collaboration, as *"sharing doesn't happen when everyone is in their own corner,"* commented Cintrón. They began modeling their new approach of working together, hoping institutions would embrace such transparency and collaboration. The unit next plans to focus on a single admissions application and will continue to integrate across sectors.

The merger was also about improving educational attainment, equity, diversity, and inclusion. While 50 percent of their students are in degree programs, 25 percent are in non-credit programs and 25 percent are in adult education programs. Their aim is to better serve all students by seeing and focusing on all students.

This change has been a part of a broader work within LCTCS to create more on-ramps and pathways to degree completion. They removed the high school diploma requirement for entry, which allows students to take courses side by side rather than sequentially, to accelerate time to completion. They determined a definition for a credential of value. They grant credit at no cost for over 100 industry-based credentials using a credit matrix, which is coded in the system to count as credit for prior learning (CPL). It has led to an additional 3,000 students a year coming into LCTCS since it was implemented three years ago.

BUDGET AND STAFFING AT AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

Location/Type:
Central TX, urban

Student Enrollment in programs:
Non-credit*: 12,000
Credit: 41,000

Accreditation:
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

From College Navigator, National Center for Education Statistics.
https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=Austin+Community+college&s=all&id=222992
* non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

Austin Community College District (ACC) is approaching its alignment work from an operational lens. "Interest in alignment has always been there," said Garrett Groves, Vice President of Business and Industry Partnerships. He noted, however, that a charge from the college to focus on processes to align non-credit programs to credit pathways and a priority from the mayor to move 10,000 people out of poverty is what enabled alignment efforts to move forward.

ACC started by focusing on staffing and budget. *"We wanted to determine where to prioritize our own funding and resources as a public college serving low-income individuals,"* shared Groves. Their first step toward removing the structural divide was to move the non-credit program manager into the role of department

chair for manufacturing, which would oversee the development of a new set of degree programs to identify opportunities for alignment. This approach averted the potential for future redundancies in the division or friction over developing employer relationships. Since the college's data showed that few students historically transitioned from non-credit to credit programs, they focused on facilitating the transition. The college designed customized rapid re-employment workforce programs that articulate into earn and learn credit programs with the same employers, whereby employees continue their education while working in order to help them advance. They also plan to launch a two-year scholarship to encourage students in non-credit programs to transition to credit programs. "We are interested to see how far we can scale our efforts by doing these structural changes, by better leveraging our budget, aligning our articulation and prior learning assessment efforts, and using our data to evaluate and scale what is working," noted Groves.

MERGED DEPARTMENTS AT HARFORD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Location/Type:
Bel Air, MD; rural/fringe

Student Enrollment:
Non-credit*: 9,200
Credit: 8,100

Accreditation:
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

From Facts and Figures, Harford Community College website.
https://www.harford.edu/about/facts-and-figures.aspx
* non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

Harford Community College is in the early stages of bringing non-credit and credit programs together to remove the structural divide. *"It began by asking how do we conduct business in a way that either contributes to student success or hinders it,"* shared Jacqueline Jackson, interim president. Over the course of one year, teams of internal stakeholders did research on these issues, identified synergies across departments, and provided recommendations for action.

Initial implementation targeted organizational structure and curriculum. They began by merging healthcare programs across non-credit and credit departments. A second merger brought together relevant non-credit and credit programs in the division of Community Education, Business & Applied Technology, led by Kelly Koermer, a dean with workforce experience. While some of the curriculum was already aligned, due to statewide

efforts and a focus on pathways to careers, Harford Community College sought further alignment. They had their electrical apprenticeship articulate into 21 credits in the professional services degree. Their credit welding program began integrating non-credit welding courses and other related CPL. Eventually, some non-credit welding courses were formally moved into the degree program. "From the employer point of view, it is not about a certificate or degree, but about skill mastery," noted Koermer.

As faculty in non-credit programs began teaching courses with a credit component, faculty in degree programs served as mentors for the courses to foster understanding and collaboration. Assistant Dean of Continuing Education and Training Sherry Massoni shared, "We have had a dozen degree faculty say, 'I've always wanted to do something with continuing education and now I can.' It is so positive." Integrating non-credit and credit programs started in the programs that had the greatest overlap or industry need and where faculty were most open to alignment efforts.

Students also identified their interest in greater alignment and noted the challenges that come without that alignment. They shared the need for clear pathways, sufficient funding, and additional advising and support to transition from non-credit to credit programs. The institution plans to expand alignment to other programs as well as to advising, registration, and student services. statewide efforts and a focus on pathways to careers, Harford Community College sought further alignment. They had their electrical apprenticeship articulate into 21 credits in the professional services degree. Their credit welding program began integrating non-credit welding courses and other related CPL. Eventually, some non-credit welding courses were formally moved into the degree program. "From the employer point of view, it is not about a certificate or degree, but about skill mastery," noted Koermer.

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DEVELOPING BRIDGE TOOLS TO AWARD CREDIT

APPROACH:
Bridge tools are used to award credit for learning in industry-focused non-credit programs when students transition into credit programs. Non-credit and credit departments may retain their organizational distinctions.

TOOLS:
Bridge tools include equivalency agreements, articulation agreements, competency-based education (CBE), credit by exam or other PLA, or credit matrices.

TIPS:
Select the bridge tool(s) that will make the transition process between non-credit and credit programs and credit awarding process as automatic as possible, without additional requirements placed on students.

CASE STUDY: CBE AND EQUIVALENCY AGREEMENTS AT SALT LAKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Location/ Type:
Salt Lake City, Utah; 10 campuses

Student Enrollment by Program:
SATTS*: 1,000
Other non-credit:** 13,000
Credit: 29,000

Student Age by Program:
SATTS average age: 33
Credit median age: 22

Student Ethnicity by Program:
SATTS: 4% African-American, 39% Latino, 8% Asian, 1% Native American, 40% White
Credit: 2% African-American, 20% Latino, 4% Asian, 1% Native American, 66% White

Accreditation:
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

From College Navigator and SLCC Factbook. http://performance.slcc.edu/Factbook/2019-20/G_non-credit/index.html
* SATTS: School of Applied Technology and Technical Specialities
** non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

Background
In 2009, the state legislature mandated a merger between the Salt Lake portion of the Utah College of Applied Technology (UCAT), a non-credit state institution, with the Skills Center, the non-credit arm of Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), to form the new School of Applied Technology (SAT), in an effort to consolidate programs between UCAT and SLCC. However, additional duplication existed within SLCC between the credit-based School of Technological Studies (STS) and SAT. Despite nearly 90 percent programmatic duplication across the two schools, SAT and STS continued to function as separate entities within SLCC.

Structural Alignment
In 2016, SAT and STS were formally merged at the recommendation of a consultant to SLCC in response to the programmatic duplication. The merger brought a focus on alignment efforts.

"The more duplication you have, the more red tape you have," noted Eric Heiser, former dean at SLCC. Heiser and his team undertook substantial structural reorganization to create the new division of the School of Applied Technology and Technical Specialities (SATTS). Six associate deans were assigned to oversee both non-credit and credit programs, leading to "much more understanding and cooperation," shared Franz Feierbach, Associate Dean for Operations & Academic Readiness at SATTS. It took time for faculty to get used to working together. Programs continued to be offered in non-credit and credit formats, with students selecting their preferred approach.

Pathway Development

From 2014-16, SATTS moved 20 non-credit clock hour programs to a competency based education (CBE) model. This was done in response to funded legislation that required affordable and flexible open terms to better serve under-employed learners. As part of this effort, SATTS and SLCC made the development of pathways to credit programs a priority.

Leaders saw how barriers to transition between programs and the lack of pathways frustrated both students and employers. The president empowered the administration to meet with faculty to begin developing pathways. "We were no longer dead-ending our students," noted Heiser, who also wanted to ensure students who completed CBE programs would not be required to retake the same course in a credit program. Internal equivalency agreements would become the bridge tool to form pathways.

Credit Determination

The college developed internal equivalency agreements to grant credit for competencies, rather than courses. Equivalency agreements pertained to a full CBE program and required students to complete the CBE program in order to be eligible for credit. The initial process took more than a year. It required bringing the right stakeholders to the table, from deans and faculty to the registrar and advisers. A senior administrator who knew regulations served as the "myth buster" to speak to objections and concerns. In addition, they developed shared values, language, and guidelines to ensure equity. Release time was given to allow faculty to establish agreements.

Faculty and staff engaged in ongoing professional development and support activities to review, assess, and align learning outcomes. The level of trust and relationships between faculty determined how long it would take to finalize the agreement. "Where trust already exists, it is easier to do," shared Rachel Lewis, assistant provost of curriculum and academic systems. It took as little as one month for faculty in the same department who teach both types of courses to develop equivalency agreements, while faculty across different schools of the college took up to a year to reach agreement.

Barrier Removal

An institutional promise program covers any financial aid gap for students who transition from completing a non-credit credential into a degree program. At least one degree program, biotechnology, is switching over to a CBE model, as faculty and administrators in the degree program realized students want to accelerate their learning. This will also provide students transitioning in from non-credit CBE programs the same educational experience, which makes it easier for these students to continue. "Students like the flexibility of CBE," shared Verl Long, Assistant Director for Academic Advising in SATTS, reflecting on how adult learners need courses to better fit their lives and busy schedules.

Results and Next Steps

SLCC is continuing to expand the number of internal equivalency agreements it offers and update existing agreements to incorporate new curricular changes. While use of the agreements has been low due to being new or still in process, recent legislation may change that. In 2020, new state legislation required SLCC to remove all programmatic duplication between non-credit and credit-based workforce programs in SATTS. In response, SLCC has chosen to eliminate credit-based offerings in favor of CBE programs, which are more affordable, flexible, accelerated, and boast higher completion rates. With equivalency agreements in place, SLCC will simply award credit when students transition from CBE programs into to degree programs.

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES

GOLD-STANDARD ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS AT THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

More than 10 years ago, the Florida Department of Education recognized that industry certifications mapped closely to community college offerings and developed a process called gold-standard articulation agreements to award credit and link them to AS and AAS degrees. These agreements, created through state statute, are part of a career pathways effort to support postsecondary continuation for certification holders coming out of high schools, technical schools, and non-credit programs in community colleges.

The agreements establish clear minimum requirements for awarding credit, though colleges may choose to grant additional credit. Agreements indicate what evidence is needed to establish credit eligibility and demonstrate connection to industry and technical skills. Students have three years after receiving the certification to apply to the relevant credit program and receive credit for the certification. "This is a perfect pathway to go from a clock hour program to an AS program, reduce cost for students, and get them into the workforce sooner," shared Kathleen Taylor, Bureau Chief, Division of Career and Adult Education, Florida Department of Education.

The creation of statewide articulation agreements required approval from the state articulation coordinating committee and the State Board of Education. An infrastructure was built to review the agreements annually. Each year, the State Board of Education adopts a list of approved in-demand industry certifications, in collaboration with the State Department of Labor. The Department of Education then maps the certifications to AS and AAS degrees, some of which are transferable to bachelor's programs, and shares the list and mapping with colleges. Faculty curriculum committees at each college must affirm they will award credit for the certification and signify how much credit. "Sometimes there is a need for consensus-building across colleges," commented Taylor, "and if the faculty across colleges don't reach consensus, then we don't go further." However, with 150 gold-standard articulation agreements in place, consensus is reached more often than not.

CERTIFICATION CROSSWALK AND STACKABLE CREDENTIALS AT IVY TECH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Location/Type:
40 locations across Indiana, the largest postsecondary institution in the state, and the largest singly-accredited community college system in the country

Student Enrollment:
Non-credit*: 170,000 students annually
Credit: 72,600

Accreditation:
Higher Learning Commission

From About Ivy Tech Community College, website. https://www.ivytech.edu/about/index.html
From Indiana's Workforce Engine, Ivy Tech Community College. https://www.ivytech.edu/workforce-engine/index.html
From College Navigator, NCES. https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=ivy+tech+community+college&s=all&id=150987#accred
* non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

For over five years, Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana has been working to align non-credit and credit offerings. *"We saw that two sides of the house didn't communicate and were even at odds,"* said Chris Lowery, Senior Vice President of Workforce Alignment. In response, they developed a certification crosswalk, which lists the amount of credit awarded for industry-based certifications. Their crosswalk includes over 100 industry-based certifications and was created in consultation with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to be accessible and student-friendly.

Certifications are aligned to degree programs and are counted for credit once students continue toward a degree program. Certifications are also part of a stackable credentials structure. Certifications stack into 18-credit hour certificates, which stack into 30-credit hour technical certificates, and then to an associate's degree.

In 2019, Ivy Tech had 8,000 student completions in workforce programs, which would be added to 28,000 degree completions. Their next steps are to codify non-credit courses into specific pathways by region, create a definition of stackability, and build out a "one door" student services approach. They have added non-credit student completion into their strategic plan and aspire to produce 50,000 credentials of high value.

CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING AT VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

System:
23 public two-year institutions across Virginia

Student Enrollment:
Non-credit*: 53,000
Credit: 228,000

Accreditation:
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

From About VCCS, VCCS website. https://www.vccs.edu/about/#statistics
* non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

The governor of Virginia invested $5 million of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds in 2019 to support capacity building at Virginia's Community Colleges in targeted pathways. Priorities included expanding credit for prior learning (CPL) strategies across the 23 colleges of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). In 2017, VCCS launched Credits2Careers, a CPL platform for veterans and military that housed all credit crosswalks.

With additional foundation funding, VCCS is expanding their web platform to become a CPL platform for all students. It can potentially provide students with advanced standing in a degree program. It is "filling the gap for workforce programs," shared Todd Estes, Director of Career Education Programs and Workforce Partnerships, as this model will apply to the many non-credit training programs in Virginia's FastForward initiative.

VCCS plans to develop a standardized way to record and report CPL metrics and to align procedures for awarding CPL across the system. They have set a goal to triple their credentials by 2021, which has driven much of the work. Having this as a system-level priority has been significant. "System leadership put it on the agenda, which helped garner buy-in from the colleges," commented Estes, *"it's all about growing a collective vision."*

THE ONE-YEAR OPTION AT OHIO TECHNICAL CENTERS

Location/Type:
53 centers across Ohio, which offer skill-based training leading to certificates, industry-based certifications, and state licensures.

Student Enrollment:
15,900

From Ohio Technical Colleges, Ohio Department of Higher Education. https://www.ohiohighered.org/otc

2014 legislation required the Ohio Department of Higher Education to establish the One-Year Option. This legislation called for the development of a process that created an opportunity for completers at the Ohio Technical Centers, which provide accredited non-credit training, to be awarded a block of technical credit upon completion to lead toward an associate's program. The Ohio Department of Higher Education created system-wide articulations by creating cross-sector faculty panels who reviewed the relevant certifications connected to the Ohio Technical Centers programs to determine alignment with analogous credit programs at community colleges. Graduates who completed a recognized program and have earned an industry recognized credential approved by the chancellor can gain up to 30 credits toward one of five associate of technical studies degrees. Fewer students than hoped have taken advantage of the One-Year Option, but it provides a pathway from non-credit to degrees for 49 different programs. "Most students go for a certificate to get a job. This is an option for them to take it further," stated Paula Compton, Associate Vice Chancellor & Executive Director, Articulation & Transfer at the Ohio Department of Higher Education.

MAKING INDUSTRY-FOCUSED PROGRAMS CREDIT-BASED

APPROACH:
The majority of industry-focused non-credit programs pursue accreditation to become credit-bearing and automatically count toward an associate's degree.

TOOLS:
Follow the accreditation process. Align curriculum and learning objectives and outcomes between workforce (formerly non-credit) programs and degree programs.

TIPS:
Have a "myth buster" or "accreditation guru" on the planning team to address questions and concerns over changes related to programs becoming credit-based.

CASE STUDY: CREDIT-BASED PROGRAMS AT THE KENTUCKY COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

Location/ Type:
16 colleges in Kentucky

Student Enrollment by Program:
Non-credit*: 18,600
Credit: 66,400

Student Age by Program:
Non-credit average age: 36
Credit average age: 26

Student Ethnicity by Program:
Non-credit: 5% African-American, 1.8% Latino, 1.2% Asian, 0.2% Native American or Alaska Native, 76% White
Credit: 10% African-American, 5% Latino, 1.7% Asian, 0.2 % Native American or Alaska Native, 77% White

Accreditation:
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

From Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) Type 1 Official Database. Snapshot data from academic year 2019-20.
Note: Many of KCTCS' shorter term credential training offerings are in credit programs rather than non-credit programs.
* non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

Background
In 1997, the technical colleges in Kentucky merged with the community college system to become the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS). Significant consolidation resulted in 32 colleges across two systems becoming 16 colleges. When Keith Bird was appointed as chancellor of the new system in 1999, he made it a priority to develop a process to award credit for non-credit programs.

Structural Alignment
Faculty and departments were merged or consolidated during the creation of KCTCS. The work required major changes to processes and administrative functions. Key stakeholders met regularly to manage the mergers and alignment. *"Operational processes were the biggest problem,"* shared Donna Davis, former System Director of Workforce Solutions.

For example, they used process-mapping to identify roadblocks, which led to rethinking and clarifying of policies and procedures. They streamlined operations and sought to address technology and data platforms that did not easily connect across non-credit and credit programs.

Credit Determination

Bird's goal to make not-credit programs credit-based sought to award learning where it occurred and provide long-term value for learning via a transcript, while still maintaining flexibility in non-credit training. KCTCS knew students would be better served by credit-bearing programs and employers would not be significantly impacted. Making non-credit workforce programs credit-bearing would also better align with state funding, which flowed more directly into credit-based programs.

The approach to making non-credit workforce courses credit-bearing was an evolving process. Starting in 2001, workforce programs awarded fractional credit for their classes and began to modularize courses. Over time, however, they changed their focus to embedding workforce certificates into degree programs. This led to the current approach of workforce courses being offered as traditional credit courses that build toward a degree.

The system assigned a team of faculty and staff from workforce and academic programs to develop a common language definition and process guide to manage the transition to credit programming. Faculty members in academic programs who taught workforce courses helped facilitate the change, as these faculty knew the content and quality of workforce offerings were the same as academic programs, simply taught in a different format. Strong system coordination and a standardized curriculum across the system also facilitated the transition to credit offerings. One of team leaders for this project became the "accreditation guru" and ensured the process, developed by the full team, met accreditation standards.

The initial review and process of gaining accreditation took one year. Now, when new training offerings are developed, faculty make a credit recommendation based on competencies already approved and can quickly gain credit approval. "We now work ahead with SACS [the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools], which has tried very hard to make certificates less onerous, while also working to meet industry needs," shared Kris Williams, chancellor of the system.

Pathway Development

KCTCS developed stackable credentials in their workforce programs and honed, over time, what could be categorized as a credential of value. Faculty began embedding certificates into degree programs when they realized students were learning just enough to get employed, but not completing the degree. Providing credentials for those courses was a way to build pathways and encourage students to complete the degree. Each KCTCS college has developed market-driven pathways based on their institution's service area, meaning not all certificate and degree pathways are offered by every college, but are still accessible through other colleges in the system.

Results

Currently, 54 percent of KCTCS' workforce credit-based courses lead to a degree and the majority of their technical degree programs have certificates embedded in them, which range from five credits to more than 30 credits. More students are gaining certificates, which are awarded along the way toward a degree. While not as many students are continuing directly toward degree completion, the credit structure makes it easier for certificate holders to go to work and return at a later time to complete the degree, which some students are doing.

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES

CREDIT-BASED OFFERINGS FOR RURAL COLLEGES, RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE ALLIANCE

There are 600 rural community colleges in the U.S., which comprise nearly two-thirds of all community colleges, but serve only one-third of all community college students. Many of these small institutions do not have sufficient faculty, staff, or funding to sustain a non-credit workforce model. "Rural colleges cannot afford to offer technical programs without external assistance and most rural students cannot afford critical workforce training without help", says Penny Wills, interim President of Rural Community College Alliance. As such, many rural colleges make their workforce program certificates set at 15 credits so students are eligible for financial aid. Many certificates do not link to degree programs, as students are just coming for the job skills, Wills shared, though students would be likely eligible for higher wages with a degree.

REORIENTING FOR DEMAND-DRIVEN PATHWAYS

APPROACH:
Design new aligned pathways for current and emerging industry demand. Some structural silos may remain. Pathways from non-credit programs are built into new programs and credential offerings.

TOOLS:
External drivers, rather than internal organization, determine pathways.

TIPS:
Be adaptive, data-infused, and partnership-based.

CASE STUDY: RE-ENVISIONING WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT AT MONROE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Location/ Type:
Rochester, New York; large, suburban

Student Enrollment by Program:
Non-credit*: 6,000
Credit: 12,000

Student Age by Program:
Non-credit: 80% 25 and older
Credit: 67% 24 or younger

Student Ethnicity by Program:
Non-credit: 28% African American,
6% Asian, 1% Native American, 52% White
Credit: 21% African American, 11% Latino,
5% Asian, 1% Native American, 57% White

Accreditation:
Middle States Commission on
Higher Education

From College Navigator & EWDC 2017-19 Impact Report
(https://user-tybgwup.cld.bz/EDIWS-Impact-Report-2017-19-ForPrinter/2/)
* non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

Background

In 2011, Monroe Community College (MCC) created the Economic and Workforce Development Center (EWDC) to reach more students across the region, better prepare students for employment, and create pathways toward degrees. The new division brought together corporate training, academic CTE, and non-credit and credit offerings. *"The traditional model is not the most efficient way to train workers,"* noted Todd Oldham, vice president of the division, so the EWDC began building other models.

Structural Alignment

Oldham reoriented the division around strategic grants development, labor market analysis, employer engagement, and flexible non-credit to credit offerings. By building up the capability for grant writing and grants management, they were able to pursue more funding opportunities, which led to greater adaptability. The EWDC took a highly proactive approach to employer engagement. They focused on account management and strong employer

relationships. They developed their own data department through which they track 108 occupations, convene large swaths of industry stakeholders to inform competency and program development, and provide targeted data for student and employer use.

Within the EWDC, non-credit and credit programs are managed separately, though students from both types of programs share courses and faculty may teach both types of courses. Faculty in credit programs help create new non-credit offerings to ensure learning outcomes are the same. The School of Applied Sciences and Technology provides credit-based certificates and applied associate's degrees, into which the certificates stack.

Pathway Development
In considering pathway development, "the challenge is to be highly responsive to industry and still develop a continuum to a degree," shared Oldham. In one example of this approach, EWDC worked with local precision machining companies to create a three-tiered educational pathway that leads to employment at each level. Level 1 is an agreement with other local training providers to transfer their non-credit machining certificates into credit, which can be applied toward MCC's precision machining and tooling certificate and degree programs. Level 2 is an MCC accelerated credit-based certificate in precision tooling. This program condenses the traditional one-year, 32-credit certificate program into 22 weeks. It aims to meet market demand quickly and get graduates into the workforce. Level 3 is the MCC degree in precision machining and tooling. This design was based on a high demand for machinists in the Finger Lakes region and recognizing the need for multiple educational institutions' cooperation to address the local skills gap.

Student Equity
Re-envisioning the division was important from an equity perspective. The EWDC provides a high-touch, case management approach to supporting students. Students indicated the importance of this support, from having the cost of programs covered or having employers pay them while they pursue their education, to knowing that there is a pathway for them to continue their education beyond the initial credential. The EWDC helps students with employment and structures course schedules around students' busy lives. The EWDC has recently been given authority to oversee career services for the full institution. This means students in credit programs, as well as non-credit programs will see the full array of options to access their career goal that includes both certificates and degrees. The EWDC will bring in its workforce staff, share its career-spanning pathway maps with all students, and infuse career services with its labor market data to better inform all students.

Results and Next Steps
Students in EWDC programs see pathways available and some have indicated plans to follow these pathways. One student in an entry-level certificate program shared that her goal was the higher-level certificate program but that she may aspire to the associate's degree. Another student in the same program noted that while it was not part of his original plan to continue his education beyond this initial industry-focused certificate, he may consider going further on the pathway.

The EWDC is also in the process of creating an Associate of Occupational Studies (AOS), consisting of all technical courses with general education included. "AOS degrees better align to industry's desire for a greater level of technical competency," noted Gary Graziano, Chair of Engineering Technologies. They are also creating a Future of Work Center that will provide flexible space that can be rapidly retooled for new forms of training and industry partners.

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES

CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE AT CUYAHOGA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Location/Type:
4 campuses in Cleveland, Parma, Highland Hills, and Westlake, Ohio, plus 2 corporate college locations.

Student Enrollment:
Non-credit and credit: 50,000 (workforce programs, both non-credit and credit, consist of 30,000 students)

Accreditation:
Higher Learning Commission

From College Navigator, NCES.
https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=Cuyahoga+Community+College&s=all&id=202356#accred
From About Tri-C. Cuyahoga Community College. https://www.tri-c.edu/about/index.html

Tri-C, as this college in Ohio is known, was charged by their president to redesign their workforce offerings to align with key industry sectors. *"We are trying to change the paradigm around workforce education,"* shared William Gary, Executive Vice President, Workforce and Economic Development. Tri-C restructured their programs to be clustered into Centers of Excellence. Each center has mapped its non-credit offerings to pathways leading to applied associate's degrees. Students are advised into a pathway through their "one door" approach. Wrap-around services are embedded in everything they do. Their attunement to credentials of value has resulted in exponential growth of awarding 20,000 certificates in 2019, up from just 4,000 certificates five years earlier. Their six centers include nursing, manufacturing, hospitality management, information technology, public safety, and creative arts. Each center reports jointly to the Executive Vice President of Workforce and the campus president.

LABOR MARKET INTELLIGENCE OFFICE AND PATHWAYS OUT OF POVERTY AT DALLAS COLLEGE

Location/Type:
7 campuses in Dallas, Texas

Student Enrollment:
Non-credit*: 19,000
Credit: 85,000

Accreditation:
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

From Fast Facts, Dallas College. https://www.dcccd.edu/about/pages/fast-facts.aspx
* non-credit numbers include all non-credit offerings, not just industry-focused workforce programs

In 2015, Dallas College (formerly known as Dallas County Community College District) aspired to have the best real-time data available in the region to anticipate emerging trends and respond to employer needs. They created the Labor Market Intelligence Office and hired a director. Grant funding allowed them to bring on more staff and begin to acquire data tools that allowed for much more in-depth analysis. This is part of their effort to re-envision their workforce offerings.

With nearly a quarter million people living below the poverty line in the region, Dallas College is focused on workforce and pathways as a way to bring more local residents out of poverty. Using data from the Labor Market Intelligence Office, Dallas College developed a living wage calculator to help individuals see how much they need to earn and what jobs and pathways will provide a living wage. They partner with employers to develop pathways and are creating options to move from credit to non-credit, as "it's all about acceleration," shared Roy Bond, Executive Director, Workforce Operations.

They are creating a new center, the Ascend Institute, to serve as a one-stop for employers wanting to work with the district. The plan is to centralize efforts in order to provide better solutions. *"If we don't start doing it this way, higher education will become outdated and industry will develop their own solutions,"* noted Bond.

SUMMARY

These case studies and examples offer several starting points to implement the new framework for alignment. Each institution and system focused on the approach that made the most sense for their students, programs, and institutions. They serve as models for those looking to take a first step or next step. They are well-positioned to continue their work and pursue full implementation of the new framework.

GETTING STARTED

Institutions, systems, states, and stakeholders, whether new to this work or continuing to the next phase, can align and integrate colleges' non-credit and credit programs by adopting the core principles below and following the getting started guides for implementation. The ideal for change is driven by leadership, articulating a vision and coalescing all of the relevant units to advance the integration. Yet it is also possible for enterprising change agents to embrace and advance to take the first steps toward this student-centered improvement by engaging like-minded collaborators.

CORE PRINCIPLES

A set of core principles guides the work. These principles are the foundation for developing a new way forward. They are represented in every aspect of the new framework and in the starting point case studies and examples to achieve the framework.

Be student-centric. Make students the starting point and continued focal point. Ask what is needed to best serve all students and ensure they thrive and complete. Build for equity and opportunity. Address the systems, policies, and processes that create barriers for students on this pathway. Ask whether any students are being left out or underserved. When challenging traditional structures and long held beliefs, "make sure all stakeholders understand that it is not about them, that it really is only about the students," advised Karen Burcks, Academic and Career Advisor at Prince George's Community College. At the state level, being student-centric translates into prioritizing equity in how the policies are developed and how the strategies are implemented. States also seek better ways to serve populations on the margins who have traditionally not been well-served. Being student-centric necessitates a significant cultural transformation and a commitment to a set of values that enables stakeholders to see their work and roles from a new or slightly altered perspective.

Be labor market-driven. Be attuned, through detailed labor market analysis, to the current and projected future needs of the regional and state economy. Authentically engage employers to continually validate and supplement labor market analytics. Create pathways that will respond to these needs. Educate employers on the value of these pathways. "Working with employers early on is the key to integrating non-credit and credit," stated Roy Bond, Executive Director, Workforce Operations for Dallas College, as, "employers help develop the pathway and ensure that there is higher level learning beyond the first job." Focus on high-demand and high-wage fields. Determine how to pivot to better meet economic needs. Go further in how the data is used and applied. At Monroe Community College, "we know what each program is worth in terms of both wage data for the individual and the impact of a new worker created for the economy," stated Todd Oldham, Vice President for Economic and Workforce Development and CTE. "Because of that knowledge, we've hired an education-to-employment manager to better link students to employment opportunities aligned to their training."

Build for innovation. Re-envision what is possible. Foster new opportunities utilizing leading evidence-based practices. "Be willing to blow up the model again and again and be flexible in the same way that business and industry are," recommended Larry Ferguson, President of Ashland Community and Technical College. This is where transformational leadership is essential. Be bold and act with urgency. "Disruptive innovation shocks the system. It forces you to figure things out quickly," noted Christine Barrow, Dean of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, Prince George's Community College. Be willing to think outside of traditional structures to meet existing and future demand. A few examples of this include the Ascend Institute at Dallas College, which will serve as a one-stop for employers wanting to work with the district; the new Business Solutions venture at PGCC, which will take a consultative approach to innovate and quickly respond to industry needs; and the Future of Work Center at Monroe Community College, which will provide flexible space that can be rapidly retooled for new forms of training with industry partners. For states, this is about supporting innovation at the institutional and system levels through the removal of barriers, infusion of new capacity and resources, enabling additional flexibility.

GETTING STARTED GUIDE:
INSTITUTIONS AND SYSTEMS

1. CHOOSE A STARTING POINT.

Commit to pursue the new framework for alignment. Select one or more starting points that match the potential and capacity of the institution and which best serve students and the local economy. Each starting point represents a different approach toward the new framework. Beyond the starting point, adopt the entire framework to fully achieve alignment and realize benefits to students and more equitable outcomes.

REMOVING THE STRUCTURAL DIVIDE

How to achieve it:
Stakeholders come together over a sustained period to design a new integrated unit consisting of both non-credit and credit programs. Address policies, procedures, systems, software, job descriptions, administrative functions, and supporting infrastructure to effectively integrate departments and prepare pathways for students.

Resources:
Alignment principles, guide, model for change, and feedback survey Prince George's Community College

Example:
Harford Community College formed a committee to make recommendations on which non-credit and credit programs to bring together in a department, based on how the programs aligned to each other and how they aligned to the institution's goals. The college then had open forums with leadership and stakeholders to consider recommendations and implementation.

DEVELOPING BRIDGE TOOLS TO AWARD CREDIT

How to achieve it:
Bridge tools connect the two sides of pathways between non-credit and credit programs. Select tools that make the process as automatic as possible, such as articulation and equivalency agreements and default CPL, over processes that can increase time, cost, and barriers to students, such as additional assessments. Make articulation and equivalency

agreements clear, relevant, and easy to use. Build in a process for regular review and updates to the tools.

Resources:
Equivalency agreement guidelines, template, and sample equivalency agreement, Salt Lake Community College
Gold-standard career pathways statewide articulation agreement, Florida Department of Education
Certification crosswalk, Ivy Tech Community College
One-Year Option, Ohio Technical Centers

MAKING INDUSTRY-FOCUSED PROGRAMS CREDIT-BASED

How to Achieve It:
Prioritize pursuing accreditation. Prepare by aligning course and program learning objectives and outcomes. Understand accreditation requirements and prepare for what additional modifications will be needed to gain accreditation.

Resources:
Workforce, business & industry, & other special topics administrative guide, Kentucky Community and Technical College System

REORIENTING FOR DEMAND-DRIVEN PATHWAYS

How to Achieve It:
Restructure programs, services, and the overall division to be more aligned with business. Invest in what matters, whether it is data tools, systems, cutting-edge training space, or a new level of functionality.

Resources:
Centers of Excellence, Cuyahoga Community College
The Ascend Institute, Dallas College
MCC to update curriculum to emphasize jobs of the future, Monroe Community College

2. ARTICULATE THE VISION.

Make the case and lead the way. Indicate the priority of the vision by embedding it in strategic planning documents, regularly speaking to it, and connecting it to other core areas and initiatives across the institution or system. Acknowledge this will be a learning process and plans may change along the way. Encourage adaptability and sharing lessons learned. Create the enabling conditions to realize the vision.

Resources:
Strategic plan, workforce strategies, Salt Lake Community College
Strategic plan, onramps to pathways (p.2), Austin Community College

3. ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS.

Bring all stakeholders to the table, including faculty, administrators, staff, and students. Assign a team to guide the process. Stakeholders are essential to support the vision, implement plans, and consistently work toward the desired outcome.

Leaders from multiple institutions repeatedly noted the need for regular, ongoing communication, trust-building, and ensuring stakeholders understand the purpose and potential impact. Clayton Railey, executive vice president and provost of Prince George's Community College, also recommends having a sense of urgency, setting deadlines to meet goals, identifying areas of responsibility, and holding stakeholders accountable. Be prepared to address how the prospect of change may invoke a potential perceived threat, particularly to stakeholders overseeing relevant programs.

Launch events and other broad stakeholder engagements can deepen understanding and commitment to the work. Training for faculty, advisors, and other student-facing staff can offer guidance on how to promote pathways, bridge tools, and funding options. Annual or semi-annual meetings for faculty and administrators to review curricular changes and data on emerging industry demand is essential to maintain strong and relevant pathways.

4. TACKLE THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM – CULTURE.

Achieving alignment requires a major cultural shift within the institution or system. Culture is not easy to change. This is where leaders at all levels will need to focus their efforts.

Start by bringing stakeholders together to reflect on the institution's existing culture and identify what cultural changes must occur. Encourage honest conversations. Address the difficult topics of hierarchical systems and professional bias that hampers the ability to be student-centric. Dispel misconceptions that pursuing alignment will reduce the quality of the curriculum. Challenge beliefs that not all students deserve access to pathways. Speak directly to unjust systems and racist policies and structures.

Changing culture requires time and sustained investment. Dedicate resources to ongoing professional development and support activities that create space for critical faculty to faculty conversations in safe settings. Give time for bridge-building. Foster relationships, partnerships, and shared goals.

5. UNDERSTAND THE DATA.

It is necessary to evaluate and apply learnings from internal data on student outcomes and external labor market data.

For internal data, collect and analyze student enrollment, progression, and outcomes in both non-credit and credit programs. Disaggregate data by key sub-populations to inform decisions that will better serve students and improve pathways. Identify inequities and barriers. "It is great to analyze the data to see who you're serving, but is even more important to flip the data and look at who you are not serving," notes René Cintrón, Chief Education and Training Officer, Louisiana Community and Technical College System.

Be prepared to tackle issues related to student data not easily flowing between non-credit and credit programs. This can be due to software platforms not aligning, as well as definitions of completion, structure of courses, and calendar terms not aligning. This is an area for continued research and improvement.

For external data, maintain a focus on what is happening in the local and regional economy. Regularly collect and analyze labor market data. Secure data services and data tools that are available for this purpose. Apply labor market data to identify and structure high-demand, high-wage pathways, update curriculum, and guide students. This external focus will position the institution and system to best serve the labor market and remain competitive as an educational and training provider.

Resources:
Labor market information, Monroe Community College
Labor Market Intelligence Center, Dallas College

6. ALIGN STUDENT SERVICES AND ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATIONS.

All institutions who participated in this research shared that adapting back-end infrastructure was a monumental task. They encouraged institutions to start from day one to plan for the system and process implications of this change.

Bring all relevant and potentially relevant offices and stakeholders into the planning process from the beginning. Develop agreed-on guidelines to inform the alignment and ensure all participants are working together with a shared understanding and shared goals. Address and modify processes and policies that will impact this work. Consider conducting a policy audit to identify existing policies that may cause unnecessary barriers to the alignment and pathway development. Know that different operating systems, such as student information systems, registration systems, and others, are not set up to align or integrate across non-credit and credit programs. Address this challenge early and expect it to require significant attention and investment.

Aim for a "one door" student services experience to provide the same level of support, as much as possible, from enrollment to financial aid resources to pathway guidance. For instance, the Economic and Workforce Development Center at Monroe Community College has taken over Career Services for the full institution in order to provide all students with the same access to advising on career options and pathways, relevant labor market data on wages and occupational demand, and support in transitioning to careers. Advising was a primary area where all institutions indicated they needed to cross-train their advisors or prepare their advisors to advise across non-credit and credit programs.

7. IDENTIFY INITIAL PATHWAYS.

Start with the most in-demand pathways based on student and employer needs. Additionally, focus on departments with certificates and degrees that make the most sense to align, as this is the low-hanging fruit that can quickly lead to the desired outcome. Do not stop there; continue to develop pathways between all industry-focused non-credit and credit programs.

Resources, Sample Program Pathways to Degrees:
Commercial food certificate to culinary arts degree, Salt Lake Community College
2020 list of equivalency agreements, Salt Lake Community College
Precision machining certificate to precision machining degree, Monroe Community College
Industrial maintenance technology certificate to industrial maintenance technology degree, Jefferson Community College, KCTCS
Welding technology certificates to welding technology degree, Hopkinsville Community College, KCTCS

8. MAKE IT KNOWN.

Promote pathways through prominent and consistent communications, marketing, and advising. Share pathways with students, employers, and the broader community. Incentivize usage. Train faculty, advisors, and other stakeholders within the institution on the pathways and encourage them to serve as pathway advocates.

GETTING STARTED GUIDE:
STATES

1. CONNECT TO OTHER STATE PRIORITIES.

Help make this work a priority. Bring it to the attention of the governor's cabinet and state work groups. Find ways to integrate the creation of pathways across non-credit and credit programs into other governor-led initiatives related to workforce and upskilling strategies, economic recovery in the COVID era, and college attainment. Knowing that education, training, and credential attainment touches all other key areas of work across the state, facilitate more opportunities for other state initiatives and workgroups to see the relevance of this project as part of the solution. Utilize these related state efforts to gain public commitment, signaling the importance to institutions and systems.

2. CREATE THE ENABLING CONDITIONS.

States play a key role in creating the right conditions to support this work at the institutional and system level. In many of the efforts highlighted in the case studies and additional examples, work was spurred along by the action or enabling context of the state. This ranged from state higher education offices to governors to legislators.

State higher education offices are particularly well-positioned to facilitate the prioritization and implementation of key initiatives. This is achieved through communications and advocacy, which state higher education offices can employ to bring visibility and support to alignment and integration efforts, both across postsecondary institutions and systems and externally to other state leaders, such as the governor, legislature, other relevant state agencies. Such visibility promotes continued awareness and focus on the work, and is a driver to show results.

State higher education offices can also apply their convening ability to bring postsecondary leaders and other stakeholders together to discuss strategies, implementation plans, challenges to address, and opportunities to embrace. State higher education offices are similarly well-positioned to facilitate faculty and administrator learning and professional development by documenting and reporting on key steps to implementation, lessons learned, and best practices and tools for alignment and integration of non-credit and credit programs. States can highlight similar efforts happening in other states and share their approaches, progress, and outcomes with institutions and systems. Insights from national policy organizations, associations, and related entities can also be used to inform implementation.

3. DEVELOP STATEWIDE TOOLS FOR ALIGNMENT.

States can spur alignment of non-credit and credit pathways by providing tools that make it easier for institutions and systems to do this work. Develop articulation agreements or credential crosswalks for industry-based certification to credit. Work closely with colleges and faculty to determine the requirements and credit-determination for such agreements and crosswalks, as Florida does with its gold standard articulation agreement. Create systems to more easily identify and award credit for prior learning, similar to the model that Virginia Community College System has developed. Consider building statewide transfer initiatives that put standards into place for the alignment of non-credit and credit pathways, such as embedding certificates into degree programs. As these tools require annual review and update, states are well positioned to facilitate the process, rather than each institution doing it on their own. States can also help with marketing these tools to students and institutions to bring greater visibility to pathways.

4. INCENTIVIZE WITH FUNDING.

One of the surest ways to support the implementation of these strategies is with funding. Systems and institutions can be incentivized to create pathways across non-credit and credit programs by aligning it to funding. For instance, Kentucky's performance based funding system incentivized KCTCS to award certificates where they might have otherwise just awarded industry based certifications, as certificates are counted in the funding system. In Utah, SLCC was incentivized to build out its CBE non-credit programs and develop pathways to degrees through line-item funding from the state. In California, legislation in 2006 created a new category of non-credit programs called Career Development and College Preparation (CDCP) that includes workforce preparation and vocational education. CDCP programs were initially funded at 71 percent of the rate for credit programs, but later in 2014, were funded at 100 percent of the rate of credit programs, incentivizing and spurring the expansion of the CDCP non-credit programs.[15] Seek to align funding outcomes across multiple sources to better position institutions and systems to be successful in their non-credit and credit pathways work. Be mindful of how other funding sources, such as WIOA and Perkins, may have separate state performance funding outcomes and requirements that will need to be addressed.

5. PROVIDE FINANCIAL AID AND ADDITIONAL SUPPORT TO STUDENTS.

Prioritize financial aid to both enable and incentivize students to move through these pathways. This could be in the form of state scholarships for students in non-credit programs to continue on to credit programs. It could be through agreements with employers to fund employees to advance their learning through continuation of these pathways. It could be through financial aid to make non-credit programs more accessible or fully covered for students in non-credit programs. Additionally, facilitate the connection of other resources and supports for adult learners or other specific populations, such as child care, housing, transportation, employment, and food assistance.

6. CHANGE POLICY TO ADDRESS BARRIERS.

Consider conducting a policy and regulation audit to identify existing barriers to the alignment and integration of non-credit and credit programs. Empower key stakeholders to address these barriers through policy and regulation change. Consider the state's role in technical components related to accreditation and program approval and how process and policy changes could further spur the seamless creation of these pathways.

7. EMPLOY LEGISLATION IF NEEDED.

While not a first course of action, legislative mandates can be effective in targeting areas or components that are out of the control of institutions and systems or that are not traditionally done at the institution and system level. Such examples come from Utah, where the legislature mandated

the merger of the state technical institution with the community college and more recently when the legislature required SLCC to eliminate all programmatic duplication across non-credit and credit programs. Legislation in Ohio created the One-Year Option, whereby Ohio Technical Centers award a block of up to 30 credits, which aligns to 49 different degree pathways. Lawmakers can also engage funding structures that hamper change or structures that support inaction, which the state higher education office is not able to achieve on their own. The key to effective legislation is ensuring all stakeholders have an opportunity to inform its development in order to avoid any unintended consequences.

8. INSTITUTE ACCOUNTABILITY.

Data collection, analysis, and reporting are essential to urge this work forward and demonstrate results. Require institutions to report on their efforts, track their progress, and show their outcomes. Recognize the significant challenges in data transparency and analysis across non-credit and credit programs. State higher education offices can work with institutions and systems to address these problems. Identify other levers for accountability, such as including non-credit credentials of value into performance based funding systems and incorporating high-quality non-credit credential attainment as a standing metric that the state higher education collects and reports.

GETTING STARTED GUIDE:
ADMINISTRATORS, FACULTY, AND STAFF

1. START WHERE YOU ARE.

While some of the case studies and examples highlighted here came from the top, others started at the individual faculty, administrator, and departmental level. Whatever your role, find ways to begin this work. Share the new framework for alignment and resources here with colleagues and supervisors. Begin the conversation about how this applies to your institution and the most relevant ways to engage alignment. Use case studies and examples that resonate. Start with the areas of greatest need and opportunity. Apply the core principles—being student-centric, labor market driven, and innovative—to guide efforts.

2. BE A VOICE FOR STUDENTS.

An important part of alignment is increasing awareness of the different experience, resources, and support that students in non-credit programs have from students in credit programs. Foster this awareness. Be the person who regularly surfaces these issues in meetings. Start to change the discussion from primarily centered on students in credit programs to a more inclusive discussion that considers all students.

3. MAKE CONNECTIONS.

Build relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators across other programs, departments, and areas of the institution or system. Identify opportunities to collaborate. Use these relationships and collaboration to make the case to departmental and institutional leadership for expanded connections across the institution.

4. CREATE ALIGNMENT IN YOUR AREA.

Start with what is available. This could be embedding a certificate into a degree program, initiating a conversation on a process to gain credit for non-credit programs, or suggesting ways to move beyond credit by exam to articulation or equivalency agreements. It could be enhancing the process for program review and assessment. It could be mapping programs to careers and wages and showing additional career options for students who furthered their education between the non-credit and credit

programs. It could be using program-level accreditation as a lever for alignment or addressing places where program-level accreditation may contribute to barriers.

5. COLLECT AND SHARE DATA.

Collect data on these initial efforts, whether quantitative or qualitative. Understand what is and is not working and what needs to be modified. Share data with colleagues, supervisors, and institutional leaders. Use the data to make the case for expanded alignment, improved collaboration and communication, greater participatory governance, and increased pathways between non-credit and credit programs.

6. PROMOTE PATHWAYS.

Whether it is the alignment that you have created in your own area or existing pathways in your students, help make sure students know about these pathways. Mention it while advising or in the classroom. Educate employers about the value and relevance of these pathways to them. Be an advocate for increased visibility and marketing of the pathways within your institution. Be a constant champion for these pathways with colleagues and administrators. Encourage others to build and expand alignment. Work with departmental and institutional leadership to begin to translate alignment and integration practices into broader policy and systems change.

CONCLUSION

For too long, non-credit and credit programs have existed separately, to the detriment of students, faculty, employers, and the regional economy. Creating pathways to align non-credit and credit programs opens the doors of opportunity to all of these stakeholders, but especially students. At its core, this work is about providing opportunity to more students to attain degrees and be able to pursue their degrees in a well-funded, supported, and equitable way. For students in degree programs, it is also about being able to pursue industry certifications and credentials of value that are relevant to their field.

The work of alignment is not easy. It takes time, planning, and the broad engagement of stakeholders. More institutions are seeing the imperative to embark on this work. They are recognizing the disservice created by the lack of pathways and lack of alignment. They are seeing that postsecondary education needs to better serve all learners, reorient itself and adapt to a changing economy, and think differently about which learning counts. Community colleges are poised to change; now is the time to achieve alignment.

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