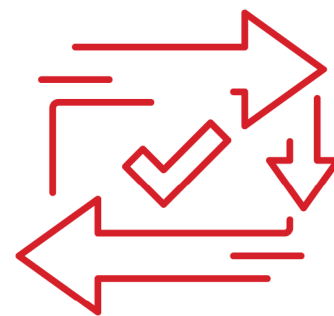


A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR NON-CREDIT AND CREDIT PROGRAM ALIGNMENT



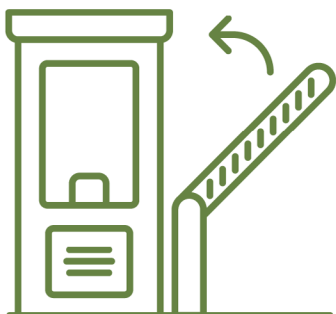
TREAT ALL STUDENTS AS STUDENTS

**BUILD PATHWAYS BETWEEN
NON-CREDIT & CREDIT CREDENTIALS**



ALIGN DEPARTMENTS & GOVERNANCE

**MAKE PROGRAMS CREDIT-WORTHY
OR CREDIT-BASED**



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.

