



Education
Strategy
Group



NON-CREDIT AND CREDIT ALIGNMENT LAB

FRAMEWORK SPOTLIGHT:

ALIGNING NON-CREDIT AND CREDIT DIVISIONS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

In 2022, **Education Strategy Group (ESG)** and the **Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT)** launched the **Non-Credit and Credit Alignment Lab (NCAL)**, a two-year initiative to support 20 community colleges and four community college systems in developing new or improved pathways between non-credit and credit programs. To help learners achieve actualized economic mobility, now is the time for community college leaders to build [*A More Unified Community College*](#) and eliminate the silos that too often exist across non-credit and credit divisions, deeply impacting the student experience.

Aligning departments and leadership structures between non-credit and credit divisions can be a challenging task for community colleges. These divisions often operate independently from one another, with different funding streams, reporting structures, and program requirements. This can create confusion for learners, who may not understand the different pathways available to them or how to navigate the various departments and offices on campus. It can also lead to duplication of services or a lack of coordination between programs, which can hinder the effectiveness and efficiency of the college's offerings. Collaboration and communication between administrators, faculty, and staff across both divisions is necessary for aligning departments and governance. This brief underscores NCAL sites' efforts to establish joint leadership across non-credit and credit and create opportunities for shared learning for faculty and staff across the two.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Learners in non-credit programs clearly recognize silos between non-credit and credit divisions on community college campuses. Administrators feel this burdensome impact as well. When key services and structures are disjointed, the resulting inefficiencies make day-to-day processes difficult to manage for faculty and staff. Aligning departments and leadership structures across non-credit and credit can help break down silos between departments, promote collaboration between staff, and engage a wider body of institutional leaders for collective decision making. To best support learners, a warm handoff between non-credit and credit must be available. This starts with enlisting a concrete enrollment management strategy that promotes continuous enrollment between the two sides and encourages alignment and cooperation across faculty, staff, and administrators to create an equitable experience for their learners. Aligning departments and leadership structures across non-credit and credit is critical to ensure that learners have clear and coherent pathways to achieve their education and career goals. This requires collaboration and communication between administrators, faculty, and staff across both divisions, as well as a commitment to breaking down silos and creating a unified approach to student success.



“THEY
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ACTION STEPS

To achieve alignment, community college leaders should build and sustain cross-functional teams that bring together faculty and staff across credit and non-credit programs for decision making purposes or establish joint leadership across the two. Close collaboration helps to ensure that all instructors, faculty, and staff are aware of the full range of programs and services available to learners and can work together to support them. Additionally, community colleges can create joint planning processes and use common metrics to measure success across all programs, with an eye toward sustaining enrollment across non-credit and credit divisions. Ultimately, alignment of the leadership structures across credit and non-credit programs can help community colleges to more effectively serve their learners and promote learner success. **Actions to get started on this work include:**

1. Establishing joint leadership across non-credit and credit for collective decision making and cross-functional buy-in; and
2. Creating opportunities for shared learning across non-credit and credit for faculty and staff.



STRATEGY #1:

Establish joint leadership across non-credit and credit, allowing for collective decision making and buy-in.

Establishing joint leadership across non-credit and credit programs is a critical step towards achieving alignment at community colleges. Joint leadership can promote collaboration and communication between departments, leading to a more effective and efficient learning experience for students. By working together, leaders in non-credit and credit programs can identify common goals, develop shared resources, and create a cohesive vision for the institution’s mission. Joint leadership can also provide opportunities for cross-training and professional development, allowing staff and faculty to gain a broader understanding of the institution’s programs and resources. While restructuring may at first bring about uncertainty on college campuses, there is potential for significant long-term gains, both through enrollment and improved back-end office functions.

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(Strategy #1 continued)

PRINCE GEORGE'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE: Removing the Structural Divide for Learner Success

Prince George's Community College established joint leadership over non-credit and credit by creating a new division, Teaching, Learning, and Student Success, in 2018. This division brings together credit and non-credit programs, promoting a more cohesive approach to the overall student experience. As a result, key stakeholder groups across non-credit and credit programs have been able to collaborate and reimagine how to package and deliver student services, including advising and tutoring. This includes mapping the student experience from recruiting, admissions, through completion. This innovative approach to aligning credit and non-credit programs has allowed Prince George's Community College to create a more comprehensive and streamlined support system for students. By focusing on the integration of credit and non-credit programs, the college has demonstrated its commitment to providing its students with the best possible learning experience.



JACKSON COLLEGE: Shifting Mindsets and Roles to Better Serve Learners in Non-Credit Programs

Jackson College is taking steps to better align its non-credit and credit programs by restructuring key administrative roles and aligning on key definitions pertinent to alignment. The institution is working towards creating a more inclusive environment by promoting a culture and mindset shift that places greater emphasis on serving learners in non-credit programs. Joint leadership is playing a critical role in this effort, with cross-training opportunities for faculty and staff and the repositioning of advisors to serve all students on campus. By taking these steps, Jackson College is working towards creating a more comprehensive and integrated approach to education that benefits all students, regardless of their program of study.



STRATEGY #2:

Convene faculty and staff across non-credit and credit divisions to establish a shared vision for alignment.

Faculty and staff bring unique perspectives and expertise to the table, and sharing knowledge across non-credit and credit can help break down silos and promote a more cohesive approach to curriculum development and service delivery. Creating space for shared learning can provide opportunities for cross-training and professional development, allowing staff and faculty to gain a broader understanding of the institution's mission, vision, programs, and resources to further support learners. Too often, program-specific jargon or differences in approach to enrollment management can confuse those working directly with learners. Through NCAL, sites established cross-functional teams to learn from one another and design and implement action plans for non-credit and credit alignment.

SAN JACINTO COLLEGE:

Establishing a Strong, Cross-Functional Team Dedicated to Non-Credit and Credit Alignment

San Jacinto College leadership has made it a priority to more regularly convene and collaborate across non-credit and credit divisions to ensure students have the support they need to be successful in and outside of the classroom. As such, in recent years, the college created a new position: The Assistant Vice Chancellor for Instructional and Support Program Efficacy. In this role, the AVC has been charged with:

- Serving as a liaison or focus contact for student support and instruction across credit and non-credit programs,
- Analyzing and making recommendations for coordinated use of internal and external resources that address targeted student support and instruction programs, including credit and non-credit career services, and
- Working with non-credit and credit divisions to analyze industry and academic trends for recommendation and implementation of new credentials.

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(Establishing a Strong, Cross-Functional Team Dedicated to Non-Credit and Credit Alignment continued)

Through NCAL, San Jacinto's Assistant Vice Chancellor for Instructional and Support Program Efficacy has overseen a work group of faculty and staff across non-credit and credit to implement an ambitious agenda to align the two and sustain enrollment. This includes representatives from:

- Student affairs;
- Information technology;
- Workforce development;
- Financial aid;
- Institutional research;
- Registrar's office;
- Admissions; and
- Academic affairs.

Together, with joint leadership, this group has created opportunities for shared learning and have established strategic priorities, namely: (1) curriculum mapping across non-credit and credit, (2) improving data collection for non-credit, (3) hiring a new advisor dedicated to non-credit to credit transitions, and (4) articulating more workforce-aligned pathways from non-credit to credit. Bringing together multiple perspectives across institutions—including students—has informed the institution's deliberate approach to better serving learners enrolled in non-credit.



CONCLUSION

While restructuring departments and systems of governance to better align non-credit and credit division may be a lift, it is one worth considering to better align personnel responsible for learner success: faculty, instructors, staff, and administrators. By committing to organizational alignment, repositioning staff to serve learners in non-credit and credit programs, and creating opportunities for shared learning and decision making across the two, colleges can reduce inefficiencies that prohibit students from successfully navigating non-credit to credit transitions.