FRAMEWORK SPOTLIGHT:

MAKE NON-CREDIT PROGRAMS CREDIT-WORTHY OR CREDIT-BASED

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.

Although non-credit and credit alignment on community college campuses requires more than articulation agreements, such agreements and other bridge tools are fundamentally important for learners to make a smooth transition from non-credit training to credit-bearing coursework and degrees. Making non-credit programs credit-worthy or credit-based is crucial to ensuring a smooth and seamless academic pathway for students who want to pursue additional education and training. Offering credit for learning acquired in non-credit programs incentivizes learners to take up additional coursework, reduces costs, eliminates course duplication, and mitigates the potential for a student to hit a dead-end. Through NCAL, over 20 new articulation agreements have been established and a number of institutions have revised their credit for prior learning policy to account for learning that is gained through non-credit coursework. This brief offers strategies for institutions to make non-credit programs credit worthy or credit-based.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Ensuring that non-credit programs are credit-worthy helps to streamline the pathway to degree programs. Articulation agreements and other bridge tools have the potential to establish a clear academic pathway for students, making it easier for them to see how non-credit programs can lead to further education and career opportunities. Moreover, through rigorous focus group interviewing, students consistently noted a desire for their non-credit education to be considered for credit. Making non-credit programs credit-worthy or credit-based is an essential strategy for increasing student success, improving workforce outcomes, and creating more efficient pathways to degrees and continued learning.

ACTION STEPS

To make certain that no learning is unaccounted for, postsecondary leaders have a responsibility to strengthen academic pathways between non-credit and credit programs. **Here are three steps** leaders should take to make non-credit programs credit-worthy or credit-based:

1. Develop and strengthen bridge tools, including credit matrices, articulation agreements, and equivalency agreements;

2. Update credit for prior learning policies and prioritize more automatic approaches to credit designation;

3. Map industry-recognized credentials to credit.

"WHILE THESE NON-CREDIT COURSES ARE GEARED TOWARDS FIELD-SPECIFIC EMPLOYMENT, THEY ARE LEARNING EXPERIENCES, AND SURELY WE CAN FIND A WAY FOR IT TO TRANSFER INTO CREDIT." THROUGH THIS JOURNEY."

STRATEGY #1:

Develop and strengthen bridge tools, such as credit matrices, articulation agreements, and equivalency agreements to automatically provide credit for non-credit learning.

Bridge tools, such as credit matrices, articulation agreements, or equivalency agreements, are critical to ensure that learning in workforce-aligned non-credit programs count for credit. They provide a clear pathway and guidelines for students to transition from non-credit to credit programs seamlessly, without the need for additional assessments. Through the work of faculty and administrators, bridge tools place the responsibility of aligning content, learning objectives, and outcomes on the institution, rather than on the students, reducing barriers to continued education and training.

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII:
System-Wide Coordination to Upskill Hawaii Residents for Good Jobs

The University of Hawaii Community Colleges (UHCC) have focused on building capacity across their seven-campus system to support students to attain industry certifications in resilient industries hiring for in-demand jobs. For example, Maui College launched an innovative new CNA to LPN year-long program in January 2023 to increase healthcare capacity statewide. The program features flexible scheduling and hybrid course delivery for working CNAs at two employer sites on three islands. Similarly, Leeward Community College developed an articulation agreement between the Office of Continuing Education & Workforce Development (OCEWD) and the Integrated Industrial Technology (IIT) program to help more learners receive credit for their Network Management System (NMS) training and certification. The UHCC established 15 new articulation agreements across the system that are aligned in priority pathways to jumpstart students into healthcare, IT and skilled trades degree programs.

BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE:
Strengthening Bridge Tools and Pathways to Credit at CUNY Community Colleges

Queensborough Community College and **Bronx Community College** have taken the initiative to update their credit for prior learning policies and articulation agreements in priority pathways, particularly in the fields of information technology and childhood development. These policy and agreement updates are important as they provide learners enrolled in non-credit programs the opportunity to earn credit for the knowledge they have acquired through prior training, work experience, or related non-academic pursuits. This can shorten the time needed to complete a degree and make higher education more accessible for these learners.

STRATEGY #2:

Update Credit for Prior Learning Policies to Prioritize More Automatic Approaches to Credit Designation

Credit for prior learning is an often underutilized tool to aid learners in making the transition from non-credit to credit coursework. By recognizing learners' prior training and automatically awarding credit for knowledge they have gained in and outside of the classroom, postsecondary leaders can save students both time and money and sustain enrollment. Strengthening credit for prior learning policies and ensuring such policies are learner-centered requires that faculty and staff closely collaborate and rethink traditional notions of credit hours and learning experiences. Institutional and system leadership must prioritize and value the learning students gain within and outside of postsecondary settings.

MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES:
Strengthen Credit for Prior Learning System-Wide

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities recently revised their system-wide credit for prior learning policy. The focus is now on professional workforce development, catering to adult basic education students, immigrants, and other learners in workforce-aligned programs. Instead of just receiving elective credit, students now earn credit toward gateway courses for their prior learning. The system has also made significant strides in developing an infrastructure that allows for the automatic awarding of credit, reducing both time and cost for learners. To ensure the success of this initiative, faculty from various regions of the state have been actively involved and engaged in the implementation process. This best practice example demonstrates Minnesota State's commitment to supporting learners' needs and promoting their successful entry into degree programs and high-quality jobs.

STRATEGY #3:

Align content, objectives, and outcomes of non-credit and credit coursework, including mapping industry-recognized credentials to credit.

Students come to postsecondary education with a variety of experiences. Sometimes, this includes having earned an industry-recognized credential either through another institution, third-party or employer provider, or even through military training. To help these individuals accelerate progress toward credit-bearing coursework and a degree, it is advantageous for postsecondary leaders to map such credentials to credit-bearing coursework. This will ensure that students' skills and knowledge gained through earning the credential are recognized and valued by educational institutions.

SAN JACINTO COLLEGE:

Recognizing Industry-Recognized Credentials for Credit

San Jacinto College is embarking on an important endeavor to map relevant non-credit credentials to credit, employing a collaborative approach involving administrators, faculty and instructors. By undertaking this process, the college aims to align relevant non-credit credentials with academic credit, enabling learners to receive recognition for their industry-recognized credentials. Additionally, the college is actively working to enhance data collection, ensuring better information is gathered on learners who have successfully completed industry-recognized credentials. This comprehensive effort by San Jacinto College demonstrates its commitment to recognizing prior learning, providing a seamless and integrated educational experience, and bridging the gap between non-credit and credit credentials, while also creating opportunities for faculty, instructors, and administration to collaborate on behalf of learners.

CONCLUSION

For many learners, non-credit training is a start to their postsecondary journey. As such, making non-credit programs credit-worthy or credit-based proves to students that their prior training is valued and an important step towards their larger academic and career goals. Offering credit for prior learning reduces the burden placed on the learner, including time, costs, potential content duplication, and other inefficiencies. While building a solid pathway between non-credit and credit requires more than the use of bridge tools and articulation agreements, they are necessary to ensure that learners have a variety of on and off ramps for continued education and training. To eliminate dead ends, a formal academic pathway must always be clear and accessible to learners.