



Education
Strategy
Group



NON-CREDIT AND CREDIT ALIGNMENT LAB

FRAMEWORK SPOTLIGHT:

REMOVING BARRIERS FOR NON-CREDIT TO CREDIT TRANSITIONS

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.

Students often face complex hurdles—from bureaucratic paperwork to confusing financial aid and registration processes—when navigating the transition from non-credit to credit programs. Too often, these barriers are experienced most acutely by adults and students of color—two populations most commonly enrolled in non-credit coursework. By providing navigational assistance to learners, reducing the number of forms needed to transition, and making the academic pathway between non-credit and credit as seamless as possible, institutions can sustain enrollment and help more learners fulfill their academic potential. Through NCAL, several institutions made strong commitments to remove barriers between non-credit and credit on their campuses. This includes creating a unified application and registration process, mapping the student journey across non-credit and credit, and providing financial incentives and assistance for learners to transition between the two.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Without a close look at the policies and practices that obstruct learners from transitioning from non-credit to credit coursework, institutions are not only hurting their bottom line, but they are limiting students’ potential to continue their education and earn a degree. For example, for many learners, the cost of postsecondary education is daunting, and if a student does not come across navigators to assist in dispelling myths pertaining to financial aid, those perceptions—whether real or perceived—become the dominant force driving a student’s decision about continuing their education into credit-bearing coursework. Institutions can create seamless processes for learners to transition from non-credit to credit coursework, but it requires collaboration across departments, faculty, staff, and administrators to ensure that no student’s question goes unanswered and that information and incentives are timely placed in learners’ hands.

ACTION STEPS

Removing barriers for students to seamlessly transition from non-credit to credit requires postsecondary leaders to investigate organizational structures, policies, and practices that expedite or impede student success. The Non-Credit and Credit Alignment Lab provided postsecondary leaders an opportunity to test new strategies and solutions to better serve learners in non-credit programs by reducing administrative barriers and burdens. While removing barriers to transition between non-credit and credit requires time and dedication, it is mutually beneficial for the learner and the institution. To get started on this work, **postsecondary leaders should:**

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| 1. | Align back-end office functions for seamless enrollment and registration experience; |
| 2. | Process map the student journey to identify gaps in the student experience for learners in non-credit programs; and |
| 3. | Deploy financial incentives and assistance for learners to transition from non-credit to credit. |



STRATEGY #1:

Strategy #1: Create unified application and registration processes across non-credit and credit for a seamless transition.

By establishing a unified application and registration process for both learners interested in pursuing non-credit and credit training, institutions are creating a “one door” experience—an experience where a student has access to assistance and navigational information regardless of the program they choose to enroll in. Furthermore, unified application processes ensure that institutions and systems are able capture data points—from academic interests to demographic information—for all prospective learners.



LOUISIANA COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM:

A More Unified Application and Registration Process

The Louisiana Community and Technical College System’s efforts to create a more unified application and registration process across non-credit and credit programs is a commendable practice that demonstrates a commitment to promoting student success and reducing barriers to critical information and continued education. By creating a single interface that connects students with the tools and resources they need to register for coursework, the system is making the process more accessible and efficient for students while also collecting immense back-end data. LCTCS leverages their application process and statewide student information system to gain a better understanding of and insights on student academic goals and demographics information to inform future efforts in support of student success.



STRATEGY #2:

Map the student journey across non-credit and credit programs to identify gaps in the student experience that inhibit learner success.



From the time a student makes contact with campus, postsecondary leaders have a responsibility to help the learner locate information they need to enroll and register for coursework. Further, as a student progresses throughout their academic journey, institutions should monitor the various touch points advisors, faculty, and staff make with learners to underscore possible discrepancies in the student experience, especially for learners who begin their educational journey through non-credit coursework. Using both quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the student journey, administrators can meet students where they are to provide timely information, resources, and support services. To help more learners make the transition from non-credit to credit coursework, and eventually persist and graduate, this is a critical step.

NORTH SHORE COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

Collectively Mapping the Student Journey for Success

North Shore Community College mapped the student journey across non-credit and credit programs to identify barriers that students may face between the two. This is an excellent practice that demonstrates a commitment by the college to understanding and addressing the needs of students. By bringing together faculty, staff, and administrators, the college has taken a collaborative approach to identifying barriers and creating student-focused solutions. This work resulted in a series of intra-departmental work groups to help ensure that the work is sustained, solutions are effective, and a number of diverse stakeholders remain involved in the process.



STRATEGY #3:

Offer financial incentives or assistance for learners to transition from non-credit to credit.

With the rising cost of postsecondary education, students are concerned about their ability to afford credit-bearing coursework, credentials, and degrees. While navigational support to understand the complexities of student aid is necessary, institutions or systems should also provide financial incentives for learners to make the transition between non-credit and credit. This includes aid to cover tuition, course materials, and other relevant costs. By investing in learners who are seeking in-demand, quality jobs, community college leaders can provide affordable pathways to sustained enrollment at the institutional level and position themselves as a leader in workforce development.



THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII:

Leveraging Federal Funding to Accelerate Progress for Career Pathways

With generous funding from the U.S. Department of Education through the Reimagine Workforce Preparation grant, the **University of Hawaii** is taking a significant step forward in empowering learners to achieve their educational and career goals by providing a \$2,000 incentive for individuals to transition from non-credit to credit training. This work is aligned with the state's [Hana Career Pathways initiative](#), which provides financial aid and assistance for learners interested in pursuing short-term training in high-demand fields. The University of Hawaii's dedication to creating accessible pathways to success is a strong example of how states and community college systems can transform lives and uplift communities through well-established career pathways.

(Strategy #3 continued)

LEHIGH CARBON COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

Uplifting Marginalized Communities through Investments in Non-Credit to Credit Pathways

Lehigh Carbon Community College has been awarded a substantial \$150,000 grant from the Justamere Foundation, aimed at bolstering their non-credit to credit health care pathways. The primary objective of this initiative is to provide scholarships for students to transition from non-credit to credit training, with a particular emphasis on supporting marginalized student populations. This funding infusion will help alleviate financial barriers and ensure that students from diverse backgrounds have equal opportunities to pursue careers in the healthcare field. By prioritizing inclusivity and access, Lehigh Carbon Community College is taking significant strides towards creating a more equitable and diverse healthcare workforce.



CONCLUSION

Strategies to remove barriers for learners to transition from non-credit and credit require institutions to first investigate which barriers are most commonplace for learners in their non-credit programs. This may include conducting internal policy audits or being intentional about understanding the student experience across the two. For institutions and systems eager to better support learners in non-credit programs, creating a more unified application and registration process, mapping the student journey, and providing financial assistance is a start, but culture shifts to reduce burdens on the learner and a eye toward equity is ultimately needed to ensure that all learners have opportunities to pursue additional education and training.