



Education
Strategy
Group



NON-CREDIT AND CREDIT ALIGNMENT LAB

FRAMEWORK SPOTLIGHT:

INCREASING DATA CAPACITY TO DRIVE DECISIONS AND ADVANCE NON-CREDIT AND CREDIT ALIGNMENT

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.

Community college leaders often know relatively little about their learners in non-credit programs. Few quantitative and qualitative data are collected to understand learners enrolled in non-credit programs, their success rates, and whether or not they transition into credit-bearing coursework or degree programs. Further, student information systems across non-credit and credit tend to be siloed with limited information shared across the two. This is particularly concerning considering that learners enrolled in non-credit programs are disproportionately students of color or from low-income households. To improve pathways between non-credit and credit, faculty, staff, and administrators need better data to inform strategy and operations. Through NCAL, sites began collecting data to assess how many of their learners begin their postsecondary journey through non-credit training and subsequently progress to credit. This work revealed both the challenges of collecting non-credit data and the insights such data can provide campus-level administrators to better serve their learners.

WHY THIS MATTERS

What gets measured gets managed; and having data on learners enrolled in non-credit programs is critical to building and improving upon pathways. For instance, capturing key demographic information on students in non-credit programs and assigning unique identifiers is foundational to capture their post-completion outcomes (either in the workforce or through additional education and training) and disaggregating outcomes by race, gender, and other factors that shape identity. Understanding which programs are prime for alignment—those that have moderate to high enrollment and lead learners to family-sustaining wages—can help institution leaders focus on developing pathways for industries that are in need of a consistent pipeline of trained workers. To establish functional pathways between non-credit and credit, student information systems must be able to link data between the two divisions. And yet, too often, information on non-credit programs is a gap for community colleges. To mitigate this challenge, state and institutional leaders have a responsibility to invest in student-focused solutions that build institutional research capacity to collect, assess, and use non-credit data to drive decision making and alignment to credit-bearing coursework and degree programs.

ACTION STEPS

To align non-credit and credit functions, student information systems and institutional research professionals must be able to capture data across the two. Strengthening non-credit data collection on community college campuses will help leaders focus on key industries prime for alignment, better understand how to solidify pathways between the two, and ensure that no learners are left with a dead-end credential. Through NCAL, sites took two major steps to increase their data capacity for non-credit and credit alignment, including:

1.

Ensuring student information systems track student progress across non-credit and credit programs; and

2.

Democratizing non-credit data for faculty, staff, and administrators to build functional pathways to credit.



STRATEGY #1:

To align non-credit and credit data, start by providing learners enrolled in non-credit programs with a unique identifier.

Even when it is collected properly, non-credit data is often siloed away from data collected on credit-bearing programs, creating division and information gaps between the two. Part of the challenge is the student information system used for students in credit programs is typically different than the one used—if one is used—for students in non-credit programs. To best support learners, postsecondary leaders need data systems that are compatible so that they can share information across non-credit and credit to measure learner mobility between the two units. Through NCAL, some sites learned that providing learners in non-credit programs with a unique identifier can be a solution to better track students between non-credit to credit. This requires institutional research personnel to collect strong demographic data when learners enroll, and use such data to track learners' academic progress across non-credit and credit divisions.

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

Unique Identifiers as a Tool to Track Non-Credit to Credit Progression

The University of Hawaii Community Colleges is undergoing a process to create unique identifiers for all learners enrolled in non-credit programs. Currently, UHCC uses Banner as their student information system. By creating a Banner ID for students enrolled in non-credit programs, the system will be able to determine which learners subsequently enroll in credit coursework. Information collected by providing a unique identifier will inform future data collection and reporting as well, including information on enrollment and demographics trends. University of Hawaii Community College staff noted, "Tracking students is important since we want to see the progression from non-credit to credit in our defined pathways." While aligning student information systems across non-credit and credit can be a challenge, assigning a unique identifier is one near-term solution for institutions seeking information on learners enrolled in non-credit programs.



STRATEGY #2:

Democratize non-credit data for faculty, staff, and administrators to build functional pathways to credit.

Data-informed decision making is essential to build seamless and functional pathways between non-credit and credit programs. As data is collected on learners in non-credit programs, such data should be made available to the broader campus community for decision making. For faculty teaching credit, seeing the volume of enrollment in non-credit programs may signal an opportunity to increase matriculation in key credit-bearing programs. For staff and instructors overseeing non-credit or continuing education, this data may inform strategy to more closely align learning outcomes and course objectives to those taught for-credit. Using quantitative data to drive decisions, and supplementing such data with student voice, can unlock the institution's and learners' potential.



SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT: Collectively Mapping the Student Journey for Success

The San Diego Community College District has prioritized democratizing data to enhance educational pathways across non-credit and credit. The District has consistently gathered both quantitative and qualitative data to gain insights into non-credit to credit pathways across the district's campuses. From the outset, the district's College of Continuing Education prioritized a data-informed approach to non-credit and credit alignment, involving multiple stakeholders in the exploration of ways to improve learner support in non-credit programs. One key aspect of this approach is the democratization of data usage on campus, ensuring that all relevant parties have access to and can contribute to the analysis. The college leverages a [comprehensive data dashboard](#), enabling both top-down and bottom-up decision making processes based on the insights gathered.

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(Collectively Mapping the Student Journey for Success continued)

For example, the College recently used data to map the number of learners who enrolled in non-credit healthcare coursework that subsequently made the transition to credit. They learned that only 31 percent of learners made the transition to credit after completing their non-credit training in healthcare. After additional surveying and interviewing of these learners, they learned that 26 percent wanted to continue to credit but didn't know how and 39 percent desired more information about the academic pathway. One student even specifically noted, "This is just the beginning of my career in healthcare," encouraging faculty, staff, and administrators to strategize on pathway development from non-credit and credit. For faculty and instructors, accessible data highlighted an immense opportunity for the district to sustain enrollment in healthcare pathways and fill critical gaps in the city's workforce.



CONCLUSION

Community colleges face significant challenges in gathering comprehensive data on learners in non-credit programs, resulting in limited knowledge of their success rates and transition into credit-bearing coursework. This is particularly concerning given that non-credit learners often come from marginalized backgrounds. To improve pathways between non-credit and credit, it is crucial for institutions to prioritize data collection and analysis. By investing in student information systems that capture data across non-credit and credit programs, colleges can gain a holistic understanding of learners' progress and make informed decisions.

Additionally, democratizing non-credit data allows faculty, staff, and administrators to collaborate effectively and develop functional pathways to credit. It is vital for institutional and state leaders to recognize the significance of non-credit data and invest in research capacity to drive decision making and alignment to credit-bearing coursework and degree programs. By implementing strategies that bridge the gap between non-credit and credit data and leveraging data-informed decision making, community colleges can better serve their learners and create meaningful pathways to quality careers.