

Different Noncredit Stages: A View of Noncredit Training Certificate Stakeholders in Two Different States

Executive Summary

With the continuous changes and needs of local employers, community colleges are experiencing an increased urgency from industry to produce effectively trained employees. While traditionally these training programs have been through credit bearing programs, there has been an exponential increase in the development and implementation of noncredit training programs to quickly accommodate workforce demands as well as provide students with increased employability opportunities. With a national demand to fill 30 million jobs requiring postsecondary education (Mullins, 2011), community colleges in collaboration with educational policymakers and industry have taken charge to meet this employment demand through such mechanisms as noncredit vocational training. Despite the increased emphasis on noncredit training programs at the community college level, there is a dearth of research into how these noncredit training certificates affect students in terms of employment opportunities, academic persistence and success, and overall program component effectiveness.

In order to add to the higher education research literature, this paper attempts to provide insights into two different models of noncredit training program development and implementation. By investigating the state of Oregon and Maryland, this research analyzes the issues faced in developing a noncredit training initiative (Oregon) and the characteristics of a more advanced noncredit training initiative (Maryland). Utilizing a case study framework, this paper investigates noncredit training perspectives at the state, institutional, student, and employer level to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the noncredit training experience. Based upon this study's findings, it outlines possible recommendations in addressing noncredit program effectiveness, student development, and employment needs.

Introduction

With the continuous rise of college expenses and increased demand for quality by its students, higher education institutions are experiencing more pressure than ever to meet the demands of all their stakeholders. Especially within the community college arena, these institutions are forced to become agile and adaptable to meet the needs of the local workforce training and development opportunities. In order to meet these local workforce needs, many community colleges have designed and implemented short-term certificates that address the specific industry needs. In fact, according to the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) conducted by the United States Census Bureau, approximately 25 percent of adults in the United States have either a professional certification, license, or educational certificate (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Within this segment of the population, employment trends illustrate that these credentials have labor market value especially for those who do not hold a postsecondary degree. Given the increasing labor impact that training certificates in particular are having on employment opportunities, there has been increased

interest in enrolling in training certificate programs. In fact, the enrollment within these certificate programs continues to increase as nearly one million certificates were issued to students in the academic year 2012-201 (Kena et al., 2015). With certificates ranging from massage therapy to network security specialists, these postsecondary credentials have generated significant traction growing from over 300,000 certificates issued on 1994 to approximately 1 million in 2010 (Carnevale, Jayasundra, & Hanson, 2012).

Specifically, important within these community college certificate programs, the noncredit training programs have continued to become a viable solution for workforce training as well as possible gateway access to further postsecondary achievement. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (1998, 2003), the enrollment in noncredit programs increased by 18 percent in a three-year period with an emphasis in vocational and workforce training (Van Noy & Jacobs, 2009). Given that most of this growth was illustrated in two-year degree granting institutions, community colleges continue to address this workforce need and as a result in the 1999, 41 percent of these

institutions offered noncredit occupational programs (Xu & Ran, 2015). As these noncredit programs continue to grow and continue to grow and become recognized by industry standards, community college stakeholders are interested in the viability of these noncredit training certificates as the new postsecondary credential. Given the scant amount of data and research on noncredit training, educational researchers continue to attempt to discover the impact that these noncredit certificates have on not only occupational opportunities but also academic outcomes and progress. Despite most research focusing on qualitative analyzes especially interviews of college administrators of noncredit training certificates, Xu and Ran (2015) provide a seminal investigation into noncredit certificates by developing a more systemized approach to understanding their impact. In their study of nine community colleges, the researchers discovered that the student population in noncredit certificates is similar to those credit certificate students and that the academic progress and success is largely determined by academic and financial support measures at the institution. By exploring transcript and student and college demographic information, Xu and Ran (2015) provide valuable insights into a potential information foundation for a national database of noncredit training program components.

In the areas of workforce credentials, it is important to understand the differences between two main credentials: certificates and certifications. While there is often confusion between these two, the main difference between a certificate and an industry specific certification is that certifications are based upon test performance, certificates are issued based upon seat time in a classroom or online environment (Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson, 2012). For the purpose of this paper, we focused on training certificates rather than industry-specific certifications.

In this research study, we attempt to investigate the various state and institutional pathways that higher education decision-makers and institutions have addressed workforce development issues through the development and implementation of noncredit certificate programs. First, we provide an overview of the national and state level trends of noncredit certificates. Next, we highlight the programs and lessons learned at a state, institutional, employer, and student level in the state of Maryland and specifically at the Community College of Baltimore County. Then, we address the Oregon developmental and implementation process of allowing Oregon community colleges to issue noncredit certificates. Finally, this paper provides recommendations for further research and training certificates program components that can assist in the student experience as well as address workforce needs. Although much of the sparse research on noncredit training certificates is based on “anecdotal” information, this study attempts to build on the noncredit training research literature by understanding multiple stakeholders’ views (state, institutional, student, and employer) in different educational landscapes. By understanding the developmental process of noncredit training programs (state of Oregon) as well as the experience of noncredit training programs (state of Maryland), we hope to offer insights as to the preparation of students for the workforce as well as investigate ways to provide training opportunities for student and employers to ensure student success and employer satisfaction.

Contributing authors from the Institute of Higher Education at the University of Florida:

Timothy J. Wilson, PhD, Policy Analyst

Xiaodan Hu, Doctoral Candidate

Trevor J. Thompson, Doctoral Student

Review of the Training Certificate Literature

Community colleges are increasingly being called upon “to partner with other educational institutions, government agencies, and employers to craft regional approaches to create new forms of economic, social, and human capital” (Bers, 2013; Phelps, 2012). According to the American Association of Community Colleges, 40 percent of those enrolled in community colleges in 2011 were studying in noncredit programs (Ryder & Hagedorn, 2012). Despite this fact, noncredit educational programs are often overlooked when compared to their credentialed counterparts (Arena, 2013). A typical differentiator between noncredit and credit programs is that noncredit courses typically do not award diplomas, certificates or degree credentials, whereas credentialed programs typically do offer a specific credentialing (Kortesoja, 2009). These noncredit courses can offer a number of benefits including employability, flexibility, and lower costs to students (Arena, 2013). Noncredit training programs at community colleges may “serve an important role in creating a bridge for unlikely or underserved students to higher educational pathways” (Ozmun, 2012, p. 9). These noncredit training programs can enable those who are unable to complete an entire degree program due to financial constraints, prior educational limitations or any other number of limitations, to receive specialized training culminating in better paying jobs.

Fouts and Mallory (2010) emphasized that economic advancement occurs when higher education, government and industry work together (Arena, 2013). The role of noncredit educational programs is to positively impact the lives of many people, to create and save jobs, and to help increase the number of educated people in a community (Baker, 2013; Milam, 2005). In realizing this, Xavier University pioneered a program (“The Business Profession”) so that students would have the ability to acquire necessary workforce skills to make themselves more marketable in the job market (Clark, 2005).

The trend in government has been to encourage the link between the college curricula and vocational educational programs for adults in order to promote economic development and to inspire competition in a growing global economy (Kortesoja, 2009). Many municipalities are using noncredit programs to prepare low-income individuals for viable jobs in the workforce (Jacobs, 2001). Funding for noncredit workforce education is often an indicator to which direction a state is envisioning the direction for community college and other short-term training programs (Van Noy & Jacobs, 2009). State general funds are funds that are set up by the state directly to the community college and that can be applied directly to noncredit workforce development programs (Van Noy & Jacobs, 2009; Warford, 2002). Despite limited state funding, noncredit programs still face the challenges of inadequate funding, low status, and adequate articulation agreements between accredited programs (Grubb, Badway, & Bell, 2003).

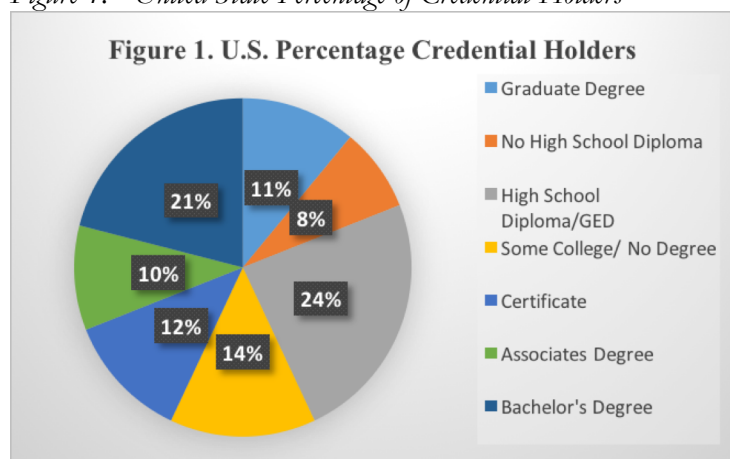
Eleven states, including the state of Maryland, use contact hours as their primary source for determining the appropriate allocations for each program (Van Noy & Jacobs, 2009). Contact hours are stated to be one of the most reliable allocation measures. Maryland also implemented a program aimed to promote college completion rates in 2004 (Clagett, 2013). In implementing this program, they created what was known as the Maryland Model (Clagett, 2013). The Maryland Model tracks students’ success rates of transfer students, including those who transfer across state lines (Clagett, 2013). This creates an interesting prototype for other schools to mirror as they explore the benefits of creating noncredit educational programs. In order for any training program to be effective and scalable, it is important to combine customized student support services with a platform to track student education patterns and experiences. In addition, it is key to have all higher educational professionals (state and institutional level) and industry involved in developing and implementing policy for these noncredit training programs (Phoenix, 2003). According to Fainholc (2010), “higher education should become the leading space for critical processes in order to guarantee the development of highly reflexive, innovative societies with the capacity to respond to the critical environments that prevail in the citizen scenarios of the new times.” Noncredit coursework in higher education has the potential to help bridge the gap between high school and the specialized workforce as well as address the “new time” that our postsecondary students are facing.

National Trend of Noncredit Certificates and Student Outcomes

In 2012-13 academic year, about 967,000 certificates were conferred by all institutions. The certificates below the associate’s degree level awarded increased by 49 percent during the ten-year period between 2002-03 and 2012-13 (Kena, et al., 2015). In terms of the overall population of certificate holders, the Survey of Income

and Program Participation (SIPP) in 2009 indicated that 12 percent of the United States labor force had a certificate (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. United State Percentage of Credential Holders



In addition to the growth of overall certificate issuance, noncredit certificates have been gaining traction. Currently, over 10 percent of community college courses were offered in a career and technical area as noncredit courses or programs (Cronen & Murphy, 2013). In fact, the noncredit student headcount has exceeded for-credit students (Xu & Ran, 2015). Among these noncredit students, about eight percent indicated in the beginning of the program that they aimed to earn a certificate. This point of view is also supported by Ozmun (2012) that in addition to obtaining skills, “noncredit workforce education students are adamant in their desire to procure some sort of certification for their training, be it a national credential or local one” (p. 16).

Some state-level agencies responded to this need by allowing two-year public institutions to grant noncredit certificates. A recent survey of NCCET members revealed that most states currently offer noncredit certificates at two-year public institutions (The OAR, 2014). Additionally, majority of community colleges viewed noncredit courses and programs as important or very important to their missions (Xu & Ran, 2015). Part of the reason is that local industries and communities have expressed such a need of skilled workforce in specific training areas (Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson, 2012). Most noncredit students aim to increase their job marketability, and upgrade their working skills to adapt to the changing business landscape. To address specific workforce needs, community colleges offer certificate programs in the most common local employer

needs. According to SIPP, the most common certificate fields include: auto mechanics, construction trades, computer and information services, transportation and materials moving, business and office management, and healthcare.

More importantly, many community colleges offer noncredit certificate to serve its mission by benefiting students. Xu and Ran’s (2015) study indicated that noncredit students tend to be low-performing and low-income adult learners. Thus, the flexibility in course schedule, delivery format, and cost of noncredit courses could serve as a plausible approach for these learners to access postsecondary education. For completers, certificates created financial returns of around \$300 per quarter for completers, especially for certificates in vocational fields for male and health fields for female (Jepsen, Troske, & Coomes, 2014). Admittedly, not all noncredit students enrolled in the program with an identified goal in mind. Ozmun (2012) indicated that students who enrolled in noncredit workforce education programs typically had completed high school and held positive views of education in general. Ozmun (2012) further indicated that the college environment itself contributed positively to the students’ educational self-efficacy, and noncredit workforce education could encourage students toward higher educational aspirations.

Among the state initiatives, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges published a paper in 2006, introducing noncredit instruction, surveying the status of noncredit courses statewide, and articulating the value of noncredit programs. In passing SB361 in Fall 2006, the California Legislature made funding possible for noncredit courses, and curriculum regulations in Title Five further changed to permit granting certificates for noncredit programs. With the wide range of noncredit programs and certificates available in California community colleges, a crucial bridge was built for students to gain confidence in their abilities toward their future in higher education and high-skill, high-wage employment (The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2009). One feature of noncredit program development is that the existence of policies for program development and funding mechanisms vary greatly by the states (Oleksiw, Kremidas, Johnson-Lewis, & Leles, 2007). Given the lack of a national data and rigorous

research on noncredit certificates, Voorhees and Milam (2005) described this non-traditional pathway of the noncredit certificate as the “hidden college.” As a “hidden college” that can constitute a majority of the student head count in community colleges, it is vital to understand both the student patterns in these programs as well as ways to foster continued student support.

Methodology

In order to understand a comprehensive view of the various state, institutional, student, and employer stakeholders in the noncredit training process, we utilize a sociological descriptive lens for policy and program implementation, the interpretive case study framework (Dobson, 1999), to guide our research inquiry. According to Yin (1999), the overall case study perspective allows for the research to engage in “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context” (p. 13). Since the goal is to understand the phenomena of noncredit training certificates from various perspectives, a case study framework allows for an in-depth analysis while allowing for representation of similar results from previous research literature.

A key ingredient within the case study perspective is the attempt of the researcher to remove themselves from research in order to allow the story to reveal itself. Narrowing down with the case study perspective, we implore an interpretive case study framework which allows for a more flexible approach to theory development (Dobson, 1999). As Walsham (1993) described the interpretive case study approach, it holds that “no correct and incorrect theories but there are interesting and less interesting ways to view the world” (p. 6). By allowing flexibility, an interpretivist case study framework fosters an environment to comprehend complex social situations and phenomena (Dobson, 1999).

Building upon the interpretive case study framework, our study utilized semi structured interviews and document review and analysis to discover emerging themes regarding the phenomenon of noncredit training certificates. In analyzing the gathered results, interpreter, data, and methodological triangulation were conducted to ensure valid analysis of the data. In the area of interpreter triangulation, the research team utilized similar qualitative methods and compared data to determine emerging themes. Data and methodological triangulation were ensured through data comparison and item coding of interview and document review assessments to guide data analysis. By examining the different state, institutional, employer and student perspectives of training certificates, our research provides a model to address and provide recommendations that can assist in workforce training and student achievement.

Maryland: A Trailblazer of Community College Noncredit Training Certificates

The State of Maryland has been a leader in issuing noncredit certificates at the community college level. Specifically, the current study examines the noncredit programs from state, institutional, employer, and student level. While the state level agencies in Maryland have been supportive in authorization of community colleges granting noncredit certificates, the community colleges put emphasis on program development and student learning. So far, these programs are well received by potential employers and students. It presents an interesting dynamic where insightful observations can be made and used as a prototypical model for noncredit coursework development in the future.

State Perspective: Maryland Community College Association

In Maryland, the Continuing Education Programs are developed and approved at the college level, instead of being sent to the state for approval. However, for each individual course which consists the programs, the state is in authorization of approving non-Carnegie-Unit-based courses. These noncredit courses should meet the criteria of not being for recreational purposes. Fortunately, the political support at the state level has been strong that the state is able to fund the noncredit programs. These non-Carnegie-Unit education was funded under the same formula used for Carnegie-Unit (for-credit) education. According to “the Cade Formula,” 30 credits or 360 clock-hours for non-Carnegie unit equals to one full-time equivalent (FTE). Besides state funding, community colleges in Maryland also receive funding from tuition and fees, as well as from their counties. However, one persisting issue is that funding is not sufficient to cover financial aid for noncredit students, unless the programs exceed 600 hours long, which is rare.

For the program completers at community colleges, most stay in local communities within the state. A key Maryland community college administrator indicated that more skilled workers could attract business to the state and help existing businesses grow. She also indicated that the key to develop statewide noncredit programs is to build programs based on actual local needs, because many middle jobs only required more than high school education, but less than three to six years of postsecondary education. However, many of the noncredit training programs and the new economy needs are hindered by the structure and restrictions of the current semester-hour and quarter-hour system. The continuing education programs in Maryland are building hour-based education and training that is aligned with licensure, industry credentials, and local employers' needs. The individual course durations are dependent upon the topics needed to acquire workforce credentialing.

Finally, the noncredit certificate programs provided community colleges with additional evidence of educational outcomes. Some Maryland presidents include the count of noncredit training certificates, which are often related to license attainment or industry credential attainment, as a part of their completion agenda. Maryland Community College Association for Continuing Education and Training has been charged to assist the college presidents to develop a more formalized method of including the noncredit program completers, in order to better measure and recognize the outcomes.

Institution Perspective: The Community College of Baltimore County

The noncredit certificate programs at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) started with the Health Industry, meeting the workforce needs in local communities. During the years, there are about 220 noncredit programs, offering 15,000 certificates annually. These credentials largely focus on middle-level jobs that require some formal training beyond high school graduation. Graduates from the noncredit programs were equipped with the skillset in specific areas, such as business and management, computers and information technology, and health and human services. Understanding the needs from both students and potential employers, the noncredit programs at CCBC connected its programs to the Occupational Information Network (O*NET), which is sponsored

by the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration. As the primary source of occupational information in the nation, O*NET identified “Bright Outlook” occupations that are expected to grow rapidly with large numbers of new job openings in the next several years. Currently, over ten CCBC programs are targeted at the “Bright Outlook” occupations, proactively offering students with promising career opportunities, as well as qualified workforce for the growing industry.

Moreover, the noncredit certificate programs at CCBC are devoted to support students. One strategy is direct financial assistance. Besides Pell Grants eligible noncredit programs approved by the U.S. Department of Education, an experimental Pell Program was offered to students in selected noncredit programs that are shorter than 600 hours. Institutional grants and scholarships are also available to support student enrollment, persistence, and completion. The second strategy CCBC utilizes is to offer students with access to a Continuing Education academic record, outlining date, courses titles, contact hours, and other student information. This record issued by the institution help students to better track their coursework and to increase motivation. This academic transcript also helped potential employers to better understand the noncredit course content, providing rigor and credibility of the postsecondary training.

Employer Perspective: Maryland Noncredit Training Programs

Based upon interviews with Maryland employers, several themes emerged regarding the view of noncredit training certificates within their industry, student training preparation, and collaboration with the local community colleges. In terms of the perspectives of training certificates, one Maryland employer indicated those students who have enrolled and participated in a noncredit training certificate are more prepared for the workplace and that the students seriously consider the need to be an “effective employee.” Though the employers stated that many are new hires and the job performance is still being evaluated, they felt that these individuals were able to communicate their industry knowledge. Not only did employers find that training certificate provided the direct job skills needed, but employers also felt that these programs fostered a clearer vision of career direction. For example, one employer indicated that a key aspect of students who have finished a noncredit training certificate is their ability to more effectively

communicate their career aspirations. Given that this particular employer works with individuals who have been previously incarcerated or suffer from chronic unemployment, it is important for these individuals to establish a sense of self-efficacy and motivation that allows them to proceed toward further career empowerment.

Employers indicated that student preparation for the job skills has been effective. These employers recognized the value of having a certificate over another unfamiliar credential (for example, recognition award). By gaining a certificate in their noncredit training, the employers held that the curriculum and assessment implied more “rigor” and “verification” that offered more attractive opportunities to the potential hire. However, employers expressed that a noncredit training certificate provided entry level opportunities but that further training and education could provide more employment mobility. Although employers did not indicate specifically as to the specific type of postsecondary credential needed for more advanced employment opportunities, the advanced skills they implied such as critical thinking, problem solving, and management skills could be embedded within a credit bearing credential.

Finally, in terms of collaboration with the local community college, employers felt that collaboration between the college and company has been effective overall. The colleges have approached the local employers to discuss training needs such as the Apartment Maintenance Tech Program created at the Community College of Baltimore County. The employers felt that community college training coordinator did an acceptable job of following up, and they recommended that the collaboration between the training partners be more “structured” and able to be assessed appropriately. Therefore, creating a structured communication and program assessment plan could be a benefit to both assess and adapt training content.

Student Perspective: Maryland Noncredit Training Programs

Interviewing students within the Maryland noncredit training programs provided insightful feedback regarding the student experience, preparation for employment, and possible adaptations to the training. One recent graduate of the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) Accelerating Connections to Employment (ACE) Program which prepares students to become dental assistants over a six-month period expressed that the classes were informative and engaging. In fact, similar to Maryland employers which expressed that noncredit students had a better vision of the career objectives, this student believed that the program “gave her a hope and gave her a path.” Based upon the completion of these noncredit training programs, the student indicated the desire for further educational training especially in the dental field with the aspirations of becoming a dental hygienist. Although the research literature is mixed as whether or not noncredit training fosters further educational aspirations (Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson, 2012; Xu & Ran, 2015), most studies indicate that training programs (credit or noncredit) that provide relevant support measures for students can have a better chance of developing students with increased educational aspirations (Xu & Ran, 2015).

In addition to feeling better prepared for the workplace, a key draw to the noncredit training certificate program was the lower cost factor. Similar to the national research that most students entering certificate programs come from lower income backgrounds, students in the Maryland system expressed a concern about their limited financial capability to pay for school as well as their aversion to debt. Given that the CCBC program offered available grants to fully fund tuition and other school expenditures, financing for the program was a considerable draw to the program as well as the ability to enter the job market at a quicker pace. In terms of the overall student and program experience, the themes that emerged were that an internship would be extremely helpful to the learning process. Especially for kinesthetic learning students, the ability to have a hands-on experience could provide a more enhancement learning experience and provide these students with “just in-time” training opportunities. In addition to an experiential learning component, another concern was the compactness of the training content and the lack of time for content retention. With many certificate training programs created for a short-term basis, it is difficult to extend content hours to allow for student reflection. However, given that students vary in terms of learning pace, it could be beneficial that training programs incorporate intentional remediation, review, and reflection activities to reinforce the training curriculum.

Oregon: Beginning the Community College Noncredit Training Certificate Model

As of May 2015, the state of Oregon has legislated as title Legislative House Bill 2410-B the allowance of community colleges of Oregon to issue certificates for noncredit training. Previous to this legislation, Oregon community colleges were only permitted to grant recognition awards (“Certificates of Completion”) to those students completing noncredit training programs at their respective institutions. Laying the foundation for this initiative, the state Oregon developed and implemented the Career Pathway Certificate of Completion (CPCC) and Less Than One Year (LTOY) certificates in 2007. Based upon these previous certificate programs, Oregon was able to gather baseline information over the years. It was this baseline data for certificate that fostered the foundation of further evidence of the need and credibility for training certificates in other Oregon Community College programs. The justification for the pursuing this initiative included a comprehensive analysis of the local, regional, and state economic factors. The landscape of Oregon consisted of 26.7 percent had a one-year certificate or associate’s degree and 11.1 percent lacked a high school diploma among adults over 25 in the year 2010. In addition, there was a considerable need to provide workforce training at the community college level especially within the rural Oregon area. In 2012, Oregon only had 11 public community colleges and two public four year institutions located in rural areas serving 40,000 students as compared 53 institutions serving 210,000 students.

Foundation of the Oregon Noncredit Training Certificate

Developing from a grassroots movement of Oregon community college faculty members, administrators, and decision makers, legislation House Bill 2410-B emerged from key, passionate stakeholders that realized the need for training certificates at the community college system in Oregon. In addition to understanding the workforce and student need for training certificates, a shift in the higher education landscape in Oregon fostered a conducive climate for the possibility of shifting from an award of recognition to a training certificate. In the process of developing the noncredit training initiative, Oregon developed a work group (entitled OAR workgroup) to address the need for Oregon’s 17 community colleges to grant noncredit training

certificates to address local and regional workforce issues. This workgroup which comprised of key Oregon community college influencers from Continuing Education, Community Education, Small Business Development Centers, and Workforce & Contracted Training Divisions proposed the legislative changes to allow Oregon community college to issue “training certificates”. In their proposal, the OAR workgroup outlined the current research justification and impact that the allowance of granting training certificates at the community college level could have on students and employers. Research and further proposal information from the OAR workgroup can be found in a white paper entitled, *Noncredit Training Certificate: Addendum to the Legislative Concept*. Key insights from interviews with various Oregon higher education decision makers and their white paper outline a story of program development and legislative action that other institutions can replicate.

From the information from this white paper and these semi-structured interviews, the story of the Oregon noncredit training initiative began with understanding the Oregon higher education landscape. Originally, the Oregon higher education system consisted of 17 independent community colleges that were not under a shared governance system. The noncredit side of the Oregon higher education system fell under the Oregon Continuing Education Association. However, a significant change in the education landscape occurred with the implementation of the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission, the development of the 40-40-20 by 2025 initiative, and the execution of the Credit Pathway Certificate. Now with a more shared higher education governance structure in the state of Oregon, Oregon initiated a new education policy entitled the “40-40-20”

initiative which outlined by 2025 that Oregon “must ensure the 40% of adult Oregonians have earned a Bachelor’s degree or higher, that 40% have earned an Associate’s degree or postsecondary credential, and that the remaining 20% or less earned a high school diploma or its equivalent.”

Coupled with the higher education restructure and the new education policy, the implementation of the Credit Pathway Certificate of Completion (CPCC) Program allowed Oregon to introduce the certificate

granting process to community colleges by offering credit-based learning for courses 12 to 44 hours that are embedded within an Associate's degree. By ensuring the rigor of the Credit Pathway Certificate and their counterpart Less Than One Year (LTOY) certificates, Oregon was able to build upon these programs to propose the noncredit certificate.

Despite the success of these previous certificate programs, the noncredit training certificate in Oregon faced many obstacles in the implementation process such as the need for a change in the state legislation and the organization of volunteers to propose the change. With the hard work of a dedicated volunteers at the community college and state level, the Oregon noncredit training certificate became a law in January 1, 2015. With the passage of House Bill 2410-B, there several areas moving that can provide valuable insights for educational administrators developing and executing a noncredit training program.

Employer Perspective: Oregon Noncredit Training

Since certificate training directly affects corresponding industry partners, it is vital to understand the perspective that these employers have regarding training certificates. The perspective of the employment industry in Oregon including those hiring potential students graduating from training programs and those education specialists directly connected to the employers. From these interviews, several themes emerged regarding the view of certificates in their specific industries and certificates affect on educational aspirations. In terms of certificate perspectives, certificate recipients especially in the area of vocational rehabilitation and occupational skills illustrated more proficient job skills and able to adapt to the work environment quickly. As Oregon community colleges move to providing noncredit training certificates, it is vital ensure the continued collaboration especially in terms of training curriculum between the workforce sector and the colleges. In fact, in this analysis as well as in other research (Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson, 2012), employers indicated that have an active role in the training curriculum provided for a more aligned and adaptable training experience.

In addition to ensuring a more active role for employer in the training development, community colleges can provide a more relatable training experience that not only provides specific job training skills but also can foster a more conducive environment for students to explore further training or educational options. As for more tailored training opportunities, employers and employer specialist indicated the beneficial nature of noncredit training certificates at rural community colleges. Given the large number of students without access to an urban training program or a four-year degree granting institution, the rural community college noncredit training experience provides a vital job training resource. Coupled with extending noncredit training to rural job seekers, noncredit training certificate can provide a sense of self-efficacy for student to continue their studies. Research illustrates that students who gain a postsecondary credential can not benefit from the increase chances of employment but also from the increased psychological motivation to pursue further academic achievement (Townsend, & Dever, 1999). In discussing with Oregon students who have finished certificate granting programs, the anecdotal evidence indicated that several students expressed further education aspirations toward more advanced credentials.

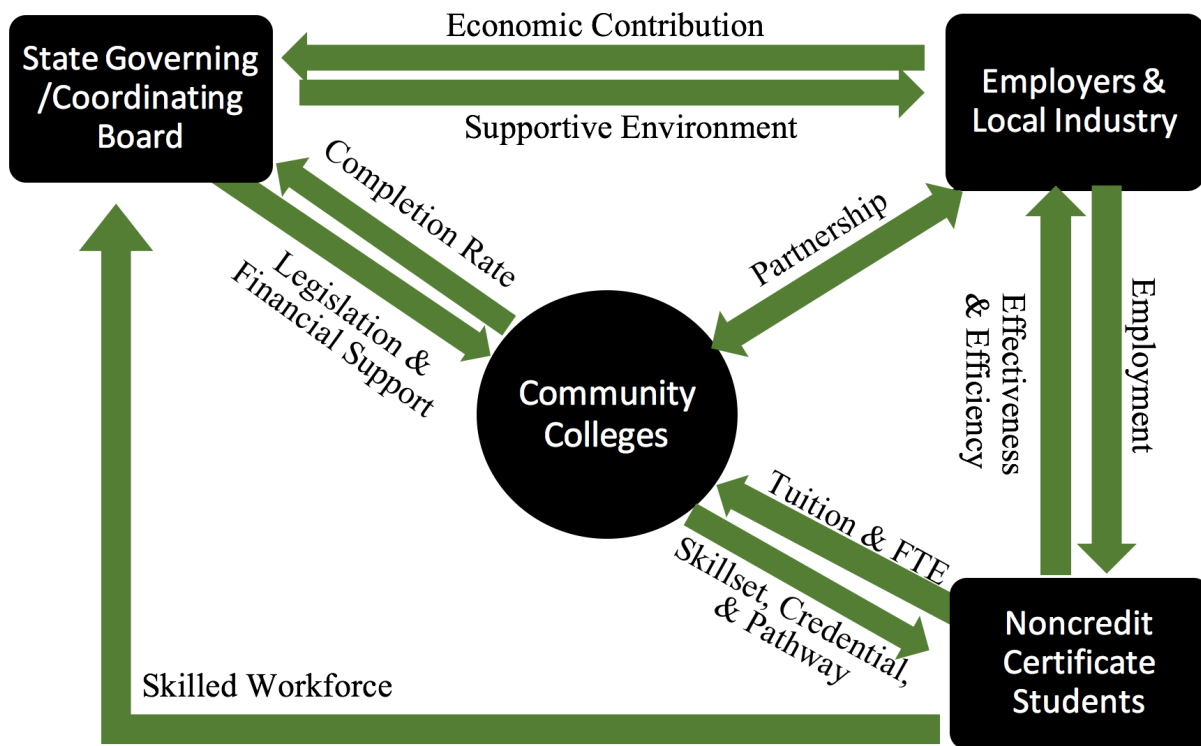
Next Steps: Oregon Noncredit Training Certificate

As Oregon commences with the issuing of certificates for certain community college programs, there will be the need to to develop and implement these training programs as well as track student progress and employment status as well as employer perspective as to the needs and effectiveness of the training. At the institutional level, Lane Community College in Oregon is expecting to offer approximately six different training programs and bundling some of these programs in order to provide students the necessary skills for employment. Some of these bundling of programs consists of previously established programs (for example, Pattern making and fashion design classes) as well as creating new programs that bundles course that thought typically would not be expected to align well fit the local and regional workforce needs (for example, security program and nursing assistance). While most of the training certificate programs offering training certificate

will consist of modifying current programs, several institutions plan on developing and marketing new certificate programs to address specific and local workforce needs. With the implementation beginning as soon as in the end of the Fall semester of 2015, more data for evaluation of the program and policy effectiveness will be available in the 2016 academic year.

The process of developing, implementing, and enhancing noncredit certificate programs in community colleges is depicted in Figure 2. State governing board or coordinating board authorizes community colleges to grant noncredit certificates. Through these programs, community colleges play a key role in supporting students to learn skills, obtain credentials, and further develop their career and educational pathways. Some community colleges establish partnership with local industry, providing training and job opportunities for students. In return, graduates from the program became effective and efficient workers for employers, contributing FTE and revenue to community colleges, and further contributing to postsecondary completion agenda, workforce development, and state economy.

Figure 2. Stakeholders of Noncredit Certificate



Recommendations

The following recommendations are based upon this paper’s case study analysis of these two different state community college systems as well as utilizing previous research on training certificates. The intentions of this analysis is to provide potential suggestions for institutions and state systems to consider as they develop and implement noncredit training certificate programs. Although the results of this analysis is limited to only two states (Maryland and Oregon) and focuses on a limited number of different two-year degree granting institutions within these respective states, higher education administrators can find valuable insights in the development and progression of these stakeholders.

A key insight gathered from the state of Oregon workgroup is the need for any institution looking to develop a training program to build a framework and plan to guide the process. According to an Oregon training

administrator, it is vital to research and partner with local industry and focus on two important questions:

1. What knowledge, skills and ability do you want students to have?
2. Is it important that they have demonstrated ability through an academic credit program or simply to just have the ability?

Based upon answers to these questions, a community college can decide on the effectiveness of its training program and how to develop competencies and learning outcomes with valid assessments that align to local industry needs. In addition to creating industry specific noncredit certificates, community colleges could develop training areas that are much broader in scope to be utilized in multiple career fields (e.g., Digital Skills training, Supervisory/Management training). After conducting an industry and job task analysis, a potential value addition to is to illustrate to students how these training certificate can lead to stackable credentials and thereby foster additional educational pursuits.

In every arena of higher education, cost is always a concern. Even though noncredit training certificates are based upon the premise of providing affordable and applicable job training, general concern about the cost of tuition continues to exist even despite how these certificates can create employment opportunities. Research indicates that a student with a workforce training certificate has greater chance of employment as well as increased earning potential as compared to their colleagues without this credential (Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson, 2012). Given the impact that a training certificate can have on employment and wage earning, more community college students have enrolled in certificate programs (Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson, 2012). Coupled with the increased employment opportunities, the cost of a workforce certificate is significantly cheaper than that of an associate's or bachelor's degree. According to Xu and Ran (2015, p. 9), they found that for that cost for noncredit training courses over 50 hours was “approximately \$180” for the course as compared to a credit bearing course which is “about \$70 per credit hour” and an average of “\$210 for a three credit hour course”. Despite the lower cost of these programs, the student demographics within these noncredit programs are often from a lower socioeconomic status and therefore often have to balance both work and school responsibilities. Given that these students handle multiple commitments, over half (53.8 percent) of noncredit students only completed two noncredit courses (one semester) without persisting (Xu & Ran, 2015). Even though the cost of college certificate is more affordable than other college credentials, there is still considerable differences as to the funding of these certificates. For example, in Maryland, the funding options allow students to seek financial support from the federal, institutional, and employer levels. As Oregon begins its process of awarding these certificates, stakeholders will need to address the various funding models as well as initiate with employers to investigate possible employer tuition stipends.

Noncredit Training Recommendations

- Intentional inclusion of industry partners in training content
- Develop broad noncredit training skills to be utilized across disciplines and industry
- Implement assessment protocol for training curriculum
- Develop outlined communication strategy with local industry to adapt and implement “just-in-time” training
- Investigate innovative financing options for noncredit students
- Evaluate and implement student support measures to foster further educational aspirations
- Gather specific student, institutional, and employment information for database development in order to make data-driven decisions

In addition to addressing issues of funding, it is important to consider the impact how students receiving these certificates can impact the workforce issues. Employers recognize the foundation and credibility of a certificate over a different type of credential title. In the development of the Oregon initiative in offering “certificates” in training rather than their traditional “recognition”, employers’ feedback as to the relevance and importance of a certificate was key in fostering the change of the credential title. Employers realize that a certificate implies both training rigor and program assessment, and thereby the concept of a certificate is more familiar to employers and also provided more credibility. Also, noncredit certificate programs can also be the magnet to draw new adult learners and industry partners into the community. According to Cronen and Murphy (2013), “Noncredit education serves an important role in supporting the growth of local business, by providing a workforce with the required skills.”

In terms of educational mobility, national research indicates that obtaining a postsecondary training certificate can affect students’ education aspirations to pursue other postsecondary credentials (Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson, 2012). Specifically, in these states and others, understanding the both the incentives and barriers to students’ potential pursuit of other such college credentials as associate and baccalaureate degrees could provide more information into the developing more effective programs and policies for these students. While noncredit training is most often related to current employment needs, gaining a noncredit credential can foster further educational aspirations. In fact in California, the community college system found that “noncredit basic skills, English as a Second Language (ESL), and Career Technical Education (CTE) are the noncredit programs from which students would be most likely to transition into credit programs” (The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2009). According to the Center on Education and Workforce, the most utilized educational pathway (62 percent) to obtain a certificate was to complete the certificate prior to pursuing further postsecondary education. Therefore, it is these training opportunities that can encourage and support student motivation and even to make that leap to more advanced programs or career positions.

An important recommendation in any training certificate program is the need for comprehensive and aligned educational support measures and adaptive curriculum. However, effective strategies for workforce training, especially for non-traditional students, should include providing program-related specific advice, supporting during the program to ensure completion, supporting job placement, and building educational pathways for skill upgrading or further education (Cummins, 2015). In particular, it is important to develop specific interventions for non-traditional learners, females, and students of color. In particular, with nearly 34 percent of certificate holders above the age of 30 (SIPP, 2012), training programs need to consider instructional methodologies and specific support services such as extended advising hours for those students with outside campus responsibilities. According to the Center on Education and the Workforce (2012), individuals who obtain a certificate can on average earn 20 percent more than high school graduates without any college experience. Research illustrates that specific program components can increase student employment and financial opportunities (Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson, 2012). These program components include opportunities to work in their field and work support programs such as job placement opportunities to gain employment.

As employers continue to really on education institutions to provide effective skills training to meet their workforce demands, community colleges will need to continually monitor the specific job skills in demand, provide adaptable and effective training content, and implement student support measure to ensure student achievement. The continuous influx of new technologies and processes demands that employers are constantly needing to train and develop employees to meet new job skills. Forecasting technology trends and innovation process can be difficult for employers, but in their attempt to continuously innovate their production or service, it would benefit community college to participate in that dialogue. For example, as automobile maintenance is one of the main certificate areas, it is vital for community colleges is understand auto maintenance trends through both researching technology trends and constant communication with relevant employers.

As a community college credential, it allows for better tracking system and understanding of student employment patterns and educational mobility. In terms of student employment, more data on the employer's needs and if students are meeting that need. As labor market needs change, community colleges will track student educational and work experiences. Unlike other higher education credentials, there is no well-organized national or state level databases that track occupational certifications or licensing. Although the federal departments (for example, Bureau of Labor) investigates union status and worker displacement and national occupational organizations (for example, gather salary information and new entries), the lack of comprehensive database for certifications is a barrier to understand the value of these programs in terms of human capital building. In addition to understanding employment data, community colleges could benefit in training program evaluation and development to understand the pattern of course-taking and dropping-out patterns to better support students.

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