

Discussion Guide: Noncredit Coursework and Programs

Generally, noncredit refers to *non-degree* courses or programs. This term encompasses industry certifications, occupational licensure, college-issued certificates, microcredentials, and apprenticeships, as well as continuing education classes for personal interest or professional development. Historically, noncredit workforce education has been integrated into the mission of community colleges, but it often remains separated from credit-bearing courses and degrees. Commonly, noncredit coursework is not integrated into academic transcripts, nor are noncredit students eligible for traditional financial aid. Unlike credit-bearing pathways, noncredit education is not monitored by consistent federal or state data systems.

Furthermore, more than two-thirds of US adults who are considering further education report that they prefer a nondegree option.¹ There is increasing interest in Washington and nationwide to understand how workforce training and up-skilling using noncredit pathways serves as a mechanism for access and continued engagement with postsecondary and the workforce, as well as the role noncredit can play toward stackable credentials and degrees. Non-credit to credit-bearing programs, particularly for community colleges, could become a strategy to address enrollment declines and ensure equitable access to economic mobility.²

In Washington, we are in early-learning stages of understanding how and where noncredit pathways provide opportunities for learners. The tables below represent the Washington landscape and is intended to be illustrative (as opposed to comprehensive) in nature.

Examples of noncredit coursework offered through Higher Education

Type	Examples * <i>intended to be illustrative in nature and are therefore not comprehensive</i>
Workforce	Certifications such as CDL, first aid, or CPR
Bootcamps	Tech, marketing, software developer coding
Professional and/or Industry Specific	Clock and education hours for teachers, nurses, electricians
Adult Basic Education	GED, ESL
College and Career Preparation	Study skills, human development, graduate school entrance exams (e.g. GRE, LSAT)
Personal Enrichment	Baking, photography, career exploration
Community-focused Youth Camps	Biomanufacturing, tech
Contract Training	Project management, grant writing, lean/six sigma, social media marketing

¹ https://sites.rutgers.edu/state-noncredit-data/wp-content/uploads/sites/794/2023/11/State-Noncredit-Taxonomy_EERC_11.17.23.pdf

² <https://edstrategy.org/esg-featured-work/non-credit-and-credit-alignment-lab-ncal-building-more-unified-community-colleges/>

Examples of noncredit coursework offered through Employers or Industry, Community Based Organizations, Skill Centers, and Libraries

Type	Examples <i>* intended to be illustrative in nature and are therefore not comprehensive</i>	Sector
Adult Basic Education	ESL, High School completion, re-integration, digital skills	Community Based Organizations, Employer/Industry
Career Exploration	Career coaching and workshops for underemployed and unemployed individuals	Community Based Organizations
Sector Pathways	Pre-apprenticeships	Community Based Organizations, Employer/Industry
Civic and Democratic Engagement	United States citizenship preparation	Community Based Organizations
Corporate Training	Trainings such as project management, grant writing, lean/six sigma, social media marketing	For-Profit Skill Centers
Digital Skills	Basic keyboarding, digital literacy	Libraries, For-Profit Skill Centers, Community Based Organizations
Human Development	Conflict mediation, leadership, communication skills	For-Profit Skill Centers
Apprenticeship Pathways	Pre-apprenticeships, registered apprenticeships	Employer/Industry
Earn and Learn/On-the Job Training	Healthcare example: CNA to LPN	Employer/Industry
Bootcamps	Tech, marketing, software developer coding	Employer/Industry

Background Materials

- Noncredit and short-term credential primer via *the Chronicle of Education*: [The Mystery of Short-Term Credentials](#)
- Collecting and Understanding Noncredit Community College Data: [A Taxonomy and How-To Guide for States](#)
- Who Transitions from Noncredit Education to Credit Education? [Evidence from Iowa and California Community Colleges](#)
- Education Strategy Group's Non-Credit and Credit Alignment Lab: [Building More Unified Community Colleges](#).
- Building Credential Currency: [Resources to Drive Attainment across K-12, Higher Education, and Workforce Development](#).

"The fastest-growing area of noncredit education, at least anecdotally, and the part politicians are excited about, is occupational training, which is either directly contracted by local employers — a business pays an institution to train its employees in a specific skill to order — or offered by the college for the area work force. The latter category encompasses both professional development — updates on new software for mid-career information-technology workers, for example — as well as entry-level training for students hoping to enter a new profession..."

– The Chronicle of Higher Education