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Iowa Noncredit Data Snapshot

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Project Background

With an estimated headcount of approximately four million students each year, noncredit education comprises approximately 40 percent of community college enrollment in the United States (AACC, 2022; Jacoby 2021). Noncredit education is the most flexible delivery mechanism within community colleges and comprises an integral part of the sector's mission (D'Amico et al., 2019; Van Noy et al., 2008). Today, that flexibility is even more critical: more than two-thirds of US adults considering further education now report that they prefer a non-degree option—up from about one-half prior to the pandemic (Strada, 2020). Additionally, 72 percent of the "great resigners" who are returning to education for training are enrolled in courses[1] lasting not longer than six months (Cengage, 2022).

Despite the importance of noncredit, multiple analyses have shown that only about three-quarters of states collect data on their noncredit programming (Erwin 2019; Voorhees & Milam, 2005). Moreover, the data collected are limited and vary across states, making direct comparisons difficult. This lack of rich and consistent data prevents a comprehensive understanding of noncredit education and results in inconsistent definitions, limited outcomes data, and overall data quality issues (see, e.g., D'Amico et al., 2014; D'Amico, 2017; Erwin, 2019; Romano & D'Amico, 2021a,b; Van Noy et al., 2008).

Purpose

With support from the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) within the National Science Foundation (NSF), the current project aims to address three key purposes in partnership with state leaders in Iowa, Louisiana, and Virginia:
1. Develop an inventory of, and develop consistent operational definitions for, state-level noncredit data elements to better understand the noncredit data infrastructure;
2. Collect and examine noncredit course/program-level data to explore noncredit offerings and their associations with enrollment rates, outcomes, instructional characteristics, and financial arrangements; and
3. Uncover the drivers of noncredit offerings and produce relevant policy implications.

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[1] In the noncredit arena, the words *course* and *program* are at times interchangeable, but also have varied definitions. To avoid confusion, we prefer the word *offering*. For a fuller explanation, see the section of this report titled "Classifying Noncredit Offerings."

Methods

This report is one in a series that will explore the noncredit data infrastructure of three US states and present descriptive analyses of those data at the course/program level. The findings presented in these reports were reached using a multi-phased collaborative approach with leaders in partner states. The first step was to develop a robust inventory of each of the data elements potentially available at the state level. Through cross-state meetings and interviews with individual state partners, data elements were organized into a series of primary categories for analysis, including Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code and noncredit type (D'Amico et al., 2014; D'Amico, 2017) as well as the number of contact hours required (IPEDS Glossary, 2021–22) and what form of nondegree credential was awarded for course/program completion (Jacoby, 2021). We were then able to identify individual data elements within each of these categories and develop operational definitions for each one (see Table 1).

The next step was to build state-level datasets consistent with the available data on the identified and defined data elements. Because the goal is to understand what noncredit is, the unit of analysis for this project is the noncredit offering (courses/programs). In the case of Iowa, the state-level dataset captures and aggregates noncredit offerings under individual CIP codes by college rather than under the name of the programs/courses offered at each college. The CIP code method allows for some thematic uniformity while recognizing that offerings at each college, though similar, have variations such as content, delivery, and contact hours. For this report, Iowa reported 924 offerings, which represent all of the CIP codes offered at each college. More specifically, if all 15 community colleges in Iowa offered courses/programs within the same CIP, each was counted as a unique offering, again recognizing the variability that may occur in noncredit education. We must also note, however, that each CIP-specific offering may be delivered multiple times per year and in different formats. Our count of 924 offerings does not include every time a course/program is delivered.

In the data tables below, findings are reported by noncredit type. Though previous research has focused considerable attention on noncredit in relation to workforce education, the typology employed covers the complete landscape of noncredit offerings. In the case of Iowa, it was not possible to determine whether occupational training was sponsored at the course/program level because certain courses can be offered as either occupational or sponsored occupational depending on the funding source. Additionally, a sizable portion of courses/programs are marked "Other"; these offerings may not fit into any category—e.g., court-ordered or state-mandated courses (DUI, permission to carry firearms)—or may fit multiple categories.

Iowa's Policy Context for Noncredit

The key driver for noncredit offerings is to meet the specific needs of states and local communities through the use of a flexible format. It follows, then, that there is great variability among offerings across states and even across institutions within a state. The following sections outline some of the important policy drivers of noncredit offerings in Iowa.

Noncredit Mission and Priorities

Community college noncredit education in Iowa reflects the areas and topics that are priorities at both the state and local levels. Offerings include courses/programs in occupational skill development leading to certifications and other credentials; adult literacy and language development training; education for incarcerated individuals; special interest offerings for personal enrichment; court-ordered or otherwise mandated courses; and courses for state-regulated licensing.

Funding

Funding for noncredit in Iowa originates from a variety of sources that are often braided together to provide comprehensive support for noncredit education. State formula funding is based on a three-year average for noncredit Career and Technical Education (CTE) enrollment. In Iowa, only noncredit enrollments that present value to the state are included in formula funding. Though value is generally equated with connection to a credential and a program duration of at least 32 contact hours (the equivalent of 2 credit hours), it is not limited to workforce-training programs. Courses with value to the state may also include community benefitting programs, state-mandated courses, and even family development and family health programs. Additional funding sources include the Gap Tuition Assistance Program, which is need-based and aligns with programs that have a documented workforce priority area; Integrated Education and Training (IET) funding, which is a mix of state and federal dollars for adult literacy; the Workforce Training and Economic Development Fund (WTED) to back the state's industry cluster priorities; and the Pathways for Academic Career and Employment (PACE) program, which is a need-based support for career, education, and personal support to include transportation and child care. Overall, Iowa provides considerable financial resources to fulfill the noncredit mission.

Drivers of Noncredit Data Collection

Iowa has multiple drivers of noncredit data collection. First and foremost is the funding discussed above. Generally, colleges are required to report noncredit data (enrollment, demographics, delivery) to the state on any offering that receives funding. This data collection is important for enrollment verification as well as to provide avenues to communicate the impact of noncredit education on the state's workforce development landscape. Second is the building of partnerships with state agencies in Iowa to share certification data. For example, the Iowa Department of Education can now track their data on all health care and commercial truck driving licensures to provide a clear connection between training, licensure, and employment. These partnerships also show that the data infrastructure is built over time. A third driver of Iowa's robust noncredit data collection is the state's participation in the American Association of Community Colleges' Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA). The VFA is an initiative for community colleges and state systems to capture the impact of community colleges on measures consistent with the sector's mission and purpose, including noncredit enrollments and outcomes.

Classifying Noncredit Offerings

Within the current project, we are classifying noncredit units as "offerings" due to the fact that this generic term can be used to capture an array of labels used across states. Iowa uses the terms "course" and "program." Unlike credit-oriented understandings of the two terms, in Iowa a noncredit program can be, but is not necessarily, comprised of a grouping of courses. A noncredit program in Iowa is generally understood to be a noncredit offering yielding a credential of value (discussed above) or another tangible result that meets the 32-contact-hour threshold (the 32-hour minimum may be waived if a program leads not only to a college-recognized completion credential but also to an industry-recognized certification). Noncredit programs may consist of one or multiple courses. Noncredit offerings classified as courses include educational offerings that may or may not meet the standards to be considered a program. For the purpose of the analysis below, all noncredit courses and programs (i.e., offerings) are included within the unit of analysis.

Data Inventory

When embarking on the project with partner states, including Iowa, the project team worked with state representatives to explore the data elements within state data systems. Following the development of categories and subcategories, the states developed course/program-level

datasets with the available and applicable data elements. Table 1 shows which data elements are available in Iowa at the state level. It is important to note that additional data may be captured by individual institutions, but only those data reported to and housed at the state level are reported here. The analysis examines if data are available on *all* offerings, *most* offerings (more than 2/3), *many* offerings (more than 1/3 but fewer than 2/3), *some* offerings (fewer than 1/3), or *none* of the noncredit offerings. Additionally, we indicated if enrollment data are available for all offerings but not necessarily for all students. Details regarding which demographics were not reported and where there were missing data by noncredit type are included in the tables and figures in the Findings.

Table 1: Table: State-Level Noncredit Data Inventory for the 2020–21 Academic Year in Iowa

Category	Subcategories	State Level-Data Availability on Noncredit Offerings
Field of Study	Course/Program Name	All
	CIP Code	All
	SOC Code	None
	Career Cluster	Most
Noncredit Type	Occupational, Sponsored, Pre-College, Personal Interest	Most
Non-Degree Credentials	Industry Certification	Many
	Occupational Licensure	None
	College-Issued Certificate	Many
	Micro Credentials	None
	Apprenticeship	None
Student Outcomes	Students Continue to Credit	None
	Completion Data Availability	All
	Pre-Enrollment Employment	Many
	Post-Enrollment Employment	Many
	Pre-Enrollment Salary/Wage	Many
	Post-Employment Salary/Wage	Many
Program Length and Admission	Number of Courses if Multi-Course Program	Some
	Total Contact Hours	All
	Admission Requirements	None
Delivery	Face-to-Face	All
	Face-to-Face Location	None
	Online	All
	Blended	All
	Competency-Based	None
	Work-Based Learning Required	None
	Student Service Availability	Some
Finance	Course/Program Tuition	None
	State Reimbursement	All
	WIOA Eligible Training Provider	None
	Economic Development Incentive	All
	Other Federal Grants	None
	Other State Grants	All
	Faculty Data	None
Enrollment and Identifiers	Headcount	All
	Race/Ethnicity	All Offerings/Not All Students
	Age	All Offerings/Not All Students
	Sex/Gender	All Offerings/Not All Students
	Social Security Number	All Offerings/Not All Students
	Institutional Identification Number	All Offerings/Not All Students
	Names	All Offerings/Not All Students
	Birth Dates	All Offerings/Not All Students

Findings

In addition to gaining a better understanding of the state-level noncredit data infrastructure, the findings below from the 2020–21 academic year represent the following key areas: (1) noncredit offerings and enrollment within the key noncredit types, (2) noncredit outcomes in terms of association with noncredit type as well as availability of outcome data, (3) instructional characteristics of noncredit offerings by type, and (4) how noncredit is funded by type.

Offerings and Enrollment

Key findings on noncredit offerings in Iowa include the following:
- Occupational training represents approximately two-thirds of all noncredit offerings and enrollments in Iowa (Table 2).
- Although women represent slightly fewer enrollments in noncredit education, they have slightly greater representation in Occupational Training, and considerably greater representation in Pre-College and Personal Interest offerings (Figures 1 & 2; Appendix Table A1).
- The majority of White students (59%) in noncredit education were enrolled in Occupational Training, while the largest proportions of both Black/African American (43%) and Hispanic/Latinx (37%) students were found in the Pre-College category (Figure 3; Appendix Table A2).
- More than one-third of noncredit enrollments do not have race reported in the data system, and just under one in five do not have sex reported (Figures 2 & 4; Appendix Tables A1 & A2). There are many potential reasons for missing data, including contract training designed for employers who may not provide demographics for all participants.

Table 2: Proportion of Noncredit Offerings and Enrollment across Noncredit Types in Iowa in the 2020–21 Academic Year

Noncredit Type	Noncredit Offerings		2020–21 Enrollment	
	n	%	n	%
Occupational Training	657	71.1%	108,231	65.7%
Personal Interest	33	3.6%	7,116	4.3%
Pre-College	63	6.8%	13,206	8.0%
Other	171	18.5%	36,101	21.9%
Total	924	100.0%	164,654	100.0%

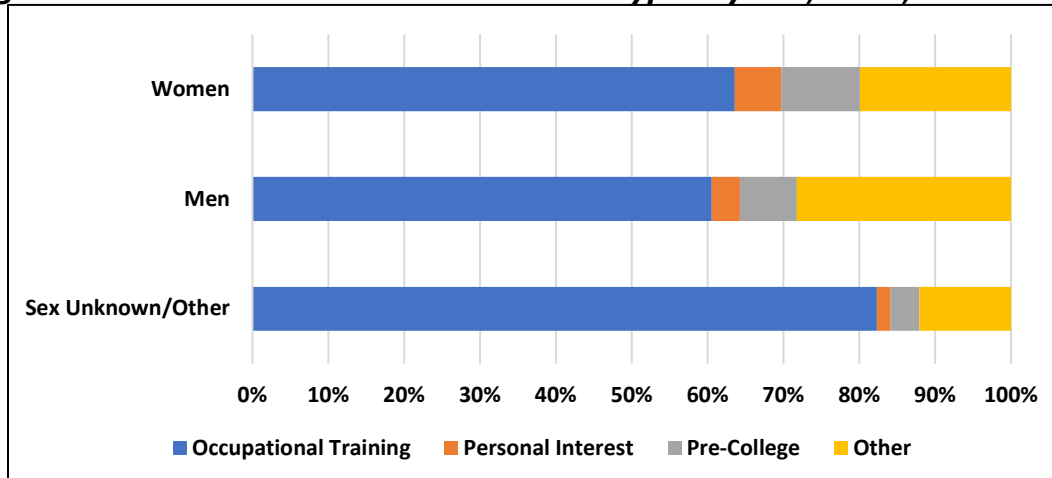**Figure 1: Percent Enrollment in Noncredit Types by Sex, Iowa, AY 2020–21**

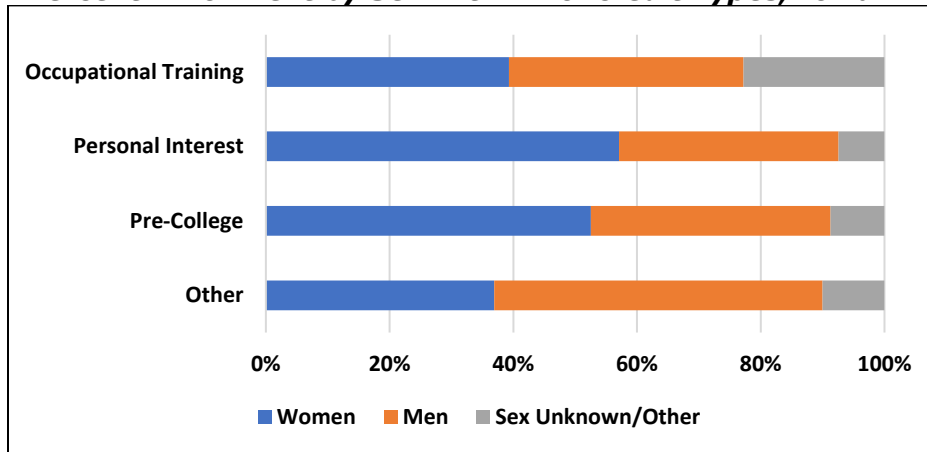**Figure 2: Percent Enrollment by Sex within Noncredit Types, Iowa AY 2020–21**

Legend: Women, Men, Sex Unknown/Other

Categories: Occupational Training, Personal Interest, Pre-College, Other

Figure 3: Percent Enrollment in Noncredit Types by Race, Iowa, AY 2020–21

Legend: Occupational Training, Personal Interest, Pre-College, Other

Categories: American Indian, Asian, Black/ African American, Hispanic/ Latinx, Pacific Islander, White, Two or More Races, Race Not Given
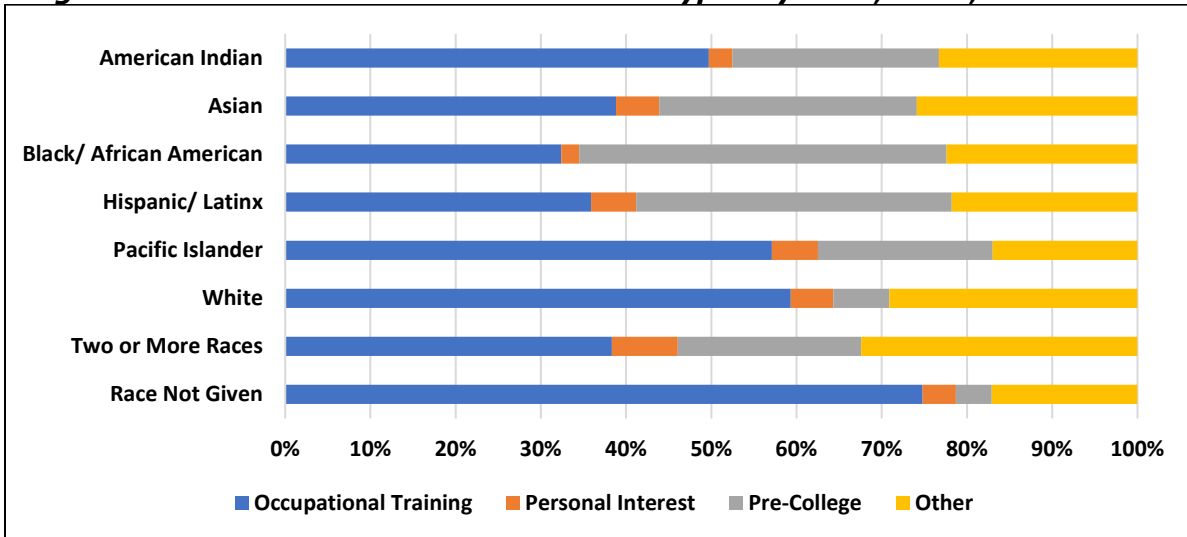
Figure 4: Percent Enrollment by Race within Noncredit Types, Iowa, AY 2020–21

Legend: American Indian, Asian, Black/ African American, Hispanic/ Latinx, Pacific Islander, White, Two or More Races, Race Not Given

Categories: Occupational Training, Personal Interest, Pre-College, Other

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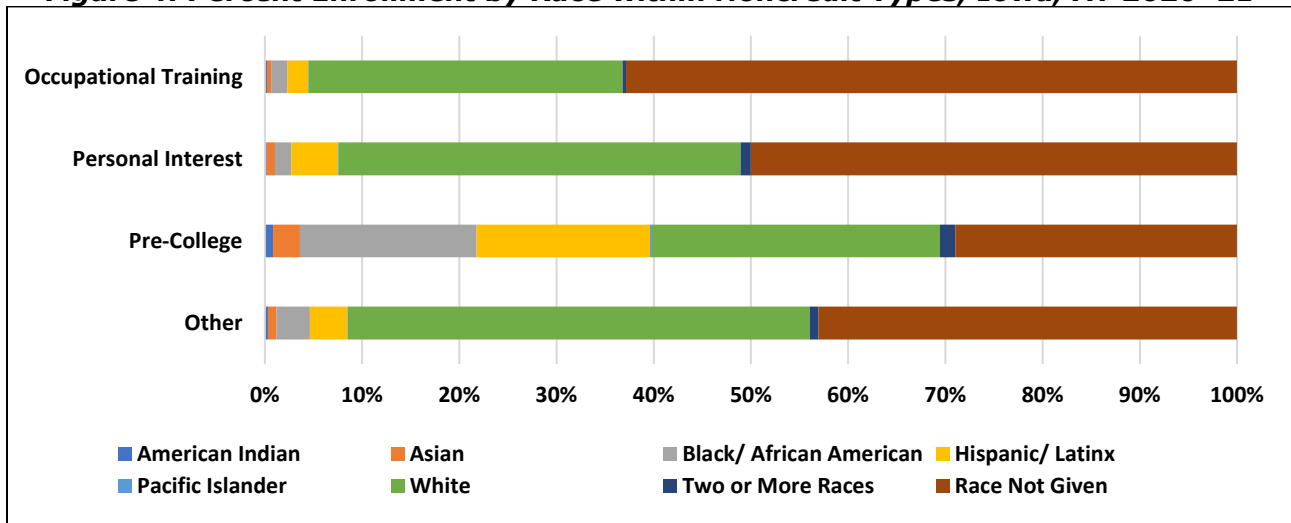
Outcomes

Key findings on noncredit student outcomes in Iowa include the following:
- The majority of noncredit offerings did not include data on non-degree credentials. However, given the importance of workforce success for those in occupational offerings, as well as the reporting requirements often associated with funding for those programs, it is not surprising that the availability of non-degree credential data is most prevalent for Occupational Training.
- Among Occupational Training offerings, more than half included industry certification and nearly 80 percent were associated with a college-issued certificate (Table 3).
- Data availability on outcomes was consistent across noncredit types, with completion data available on all offerings and labor market outcomes data available on nearly 43 percent of Occupational Training offerings (Table 4).

Table 3: Non-Degree Credentials by Noncredit Type in Iowa in the 2020–21 Academic Year

Noncredit Type	Non-Degree Credentials	
	% with Industry Certification	% with College-Issued Certificate
Occupational Training (n=280)	53.9%	79.6%
Personal Interest (n=4)	75.0%	100.0%
Pre-College (n=3)	0.0%	33.0%
Other (n=50)	88.0%	70.0%
Missing (n=578)	NA	NA

Table 4: Outcome Data Availability by Noncredit Type in Iowa in the 2020–21 Academic Year

Noncredit Type		Type of Completion Data		Labor Market Data			
	% with Completion Data	% with Complete /Not Complete	% with Pass/ Fail	% with Pre-Enrollment Employment Data	% with Post-Enrollment Employment Data	% with Pre-Enrollment Salary/ Wage Data	% with Post-Enrollment Salary/ Wage Data
Occupational Training (n=657)	100%	42.6%	57.4%	42.6%	42.6%	42.6%	42.6%
Personal Interest (n=33)	100%	12.1%	87.9%	12.1%	12.1%	12.1%	12.1%
Pre-College (n=63)	100%	4.8%	95.2%	4.8%	4.8%	4.8%	4.8%
Other (n=171)	100%	29.2%	70.8%	29.2%	29.2%	29.2%	29.2%

Instructional Characteristics

Key findings regarding the instructional characteristics of noncredit education in Iowa include the following (Table 7):
- Only 11 percent of noncredit programs involved multiple courses (105 of 924 offerings).
- Pre-College offerings tended to require the greatest number of contact hours, followed by those in Occupational Training.
- The vast majority of noncredit offerings were delivered face-to-face. Online courses were offered less frequently than face-to-face in all cases, even during the 2020–21 academic year, when COVID was a driver of online delivery.

- Career advising (a data element used to represent support services in this analysis) was offered most often to Pre-College (91%) enrollees followed by those in Occupational Training (28%) courses/programs.

Table 5: Instructional Characteristics by Noncredit Type in Iowa in the 2020–21 Academic Year

| Noncredit Type | Number of Multi-Course Programs | Median Contact Hours | Mean Contact Hours | Delivery | | | % with Career Advising Offered to Students |
				% Face-to-Face	% Blended Face-to-Face/Online	% Online	
Occupational Training (n=657)	85	26	51	75.0%	6.8%	45.5%	27.9%
Personal Interest (n=33)	1	11	16	72.7%	0.0%	60.6%	6.1%
Pre-College (n=63)	1	97	114	88.9%	12.7%	30.2%	90.5%
Other (n=171)	18	7	14	85.4%	4.7%	33.3%	23.4%

Finance

Key findings on the financing of noncredit in Iowa include the following (Table 8):
- Nearly all Occupational Training (99%) and most Pre-College (87%) noncredit offerings received state funding, and additional state grants were available for nine of every ten Pre-College offerings. For instance, Gap and PACE dollars, which are used for students on a need basis, can be used toward Occupational Training in addition to Pre-College education for those concurrently working on high school completion as well as workforce preparation.
- Approximately 23 percent of Occupational Training courses/programs were offered through customized training as an economic development incentive.
- Many Occupational Training offerings were eligible for multiple sources of funding.

Table 6: Financing Noncredit Offerings by Noncredit Type in Iowa in the 2020–21 Academic Year

Noncredit Type	% Receiving State Reimbursement	% Offered as Economic Development Incentive	% Eligible for Other State Grant
Occupational Training (n=657)	98.6%	22.8%	27.9%
Personal Interest (n=33)	18.2%	0.0%	6.1%
Pre-College (n=63)	87.3%	0.0%	90.5%
Other (n=171)	71.9%	0.0%	23.4%

Conclusions

As the project team works with the partners of individual states to learn about noncredit offerings and the noncredit data infrastructure, there are several conclusions and lessons learned specific to the findings on Iowa and the corresponding state context:
- Iowa's robust noncredit data collection is closely tied to the significant levels of state support from multiple sources. Ultimately, funding requires data collection to verify enrollments and to track outcomes and other impacts. In this case, *what gets funded gets measured*, which explains why we may see more complete data on funded offerings, such as those supported by Gap; PACE for wraparound services; Adult Education & Literacy,

which receives both state and federal dollars; and those offerings delivered due to contract training through the Iowa Jobs Training Programs for new and expanding industry in the state.

- Still there are significant gaps in the data, with the majority of noncredit enrollees in 2020–21 not having a reported race in the state data system. As seen with the partnerships to connect data with state licensure in selected career fields, however, Iowa embraces the idea that the data infrastructure grows over time. There are hopes that the current project may lead to insights that could expand future data collection.
- Some of the observations in terms of missing data, categorizing offerings into noncredit types, and developing operational definitions for data elements offer guidance for colleges to prepare for any future federal noncredit data collection. While IPEDS had proposed noncredit data collection beginning in 2023-24, they ultimately decided to not move forward. However, heightened interest in noncredit could potentially lead to future data collection.
- Gaining insights into community college noncredit education, especially the instructional characteristics (e.g., contact hours), the availability of non-degree credentials, and labor market outcomes data, could prove useful as Congress considers Short-Term Pell Grants for offerings as short as 150 hours/8 weeks. For instance, understanding which and how many noncredit offerings currently track completion rates and labor market outcomes informs whether the reporting infrastructure is in place to support such a program. Additionally, considering how Iowa funds noncredit offerings—those perceived as having value to the state—offers context into the necessary guardrails that will have to be considered in the determination of which offerings to approve as eligible for federal student aid.

Following a series of state-specific explorations, including this one on Iowa, the project team is moving toward a cross-state analysis and the development of a noncredit data taxonomy. The resulting classification system will be intended to help guide states as they seek to expand their noncredit data collection efforts and gain a better understanding of the impact of their noncredit offerings.

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Appendix

Table A1: Noncredit Enrollment by Noncredit Type and Sex (Iowa, AY 2020–21)

Noncredit Type	Men	Women	Sex Unknown /Other	Total
Occupational Training	41,043	42,486	24,702	108,231
% within sex	60.5%	63.6%	82.4%	
% within noncredit type	37.9%	39.3%	22.8%	
Personal Interest	2,526	4,061	529	7,116
% within sex	3.7%	6.1%	1.8%	
% within noncredit type	35.5%	57.1%	7.4%	
Pre-College	5,117	6,939	1,150	13,206
% within sex	7.5%	10.4%	3.8%	
% within noncredit type	38.7%	52.5%	8.7%	
Other	19,160	13,326	3,615	36,101
% within sex	28.2%	19.9%	12.1%	
% within noncredit type	53.1%	36.9%	10.0%	
Total	67,846	66,812	29,996	164,654

Table A2: Noncredit Enrollment by Noncredit Type and Race (Iowa, AY 2020–21)

Noncredit Type	American Indian	Asian	Black/ African American	Hispanic / Latinx	Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races	Race Not Given	Race Total
Occupational Training	232	469	1,803	2,288	64	34,969	372	68,034	108,231
% within race	49.7%	38.8%	32.4%	35.9%	57.1%	59.3%	38.3%	74.8%	
% within noncredit type	0.2%	0.4%	1.7%	2.1%	0.1%	32.3%	0.3%	62.9%	
Personal Interest	13	62	118	340	6	2,943	75	3,559	7,116
% within race	2.8%	5.1%	2.1%	5.3%	5.4%	5.0%	7.7%	3.9%	
% within noncredit type	0.2%	0.9%	1.7%	4.8%	0.1%	41.4%	1.1%	50.0%	
Pre-College	113	365	2,400	2,356	23	3,913	209	3,827	13,206
% within race	24.2%	30.2%	43.1%	37.0%	20.5%	6.6%	21.5%	4.2%	
% within noncredit type	0.9%	2.8%	18.2%	17.8%	0.2%	29.6%	1.6%	29.0%	
Other	109	313	1,244	1,392	19	17,157	315	15,552	36,101
% within race	23.3%	25.9%	22.4%	21.8%	17.0%	29.1%	32.4%	17.1%	
% within noncredit type	0.3%	0.9%	3.4%	3.9%	0.1%	47.5%	0.9%	43.1%	
Total	467	1,209	5,565	6,376	112	58,982	971	90,972	164,654

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