

# Creating Opportunity for All

Building Pathways  
from Continuing Education  
to Credit Programs



January 2018

Derek V. Price, DVP-PRAXIS LTD  
Wendy Sedlak, Equal Measure

**EQUAL**  
MEASURE

FINDING  
PROMISE  
FUELING  
CHANGE

  
Achieving  
the Dream™

 DVP - PRAXIS

# Preface

---

Community college students start college with goals including transferring to earn a bachelor's degree and gaining the skills and credentials that have immediate labor market value. These goals are not mutually exclusive. Students deserve access to clear pathways, whether they enroll in short-term education and training programs or in college credit-based programs. But in colleges across the nation, these programs are not connected, making it complex and difficult for students to progress and meet their career and academic goals. Achieving the Dream is working with colleges to connect their noncredit and credit divisions.

In 2013, Achieving the Dream convened seven network colleges to form the Northeast Resiliency Consortium (NRC). Created in the wake of natural and manmade disasters, the consortium sought to develop a resilient workforce. Led by Passaic County Community College, and including Atlantic Cape Community College, Bunker Hill Community College, Capital Community College, Housatonic Community College, Kingsborough Community College, and LaGuardia Community College, the consortium was awarded \$23.5 million from the US Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training (TAACCCT) program. Achieving the Dream served as the consortium's convening partner and as an intermediary to support peer learning among colleges, provide technical assistance, host in-person consortium convenings, and promote promising strategies implemented by the consortium.

One important challenge the NRC colleges took on was aligning continuing education and credit programs along a career pathway to meet student and labor market needs. This brief describes how the colleges made adjustments to articulate non-credit to credit credentials to ensure strong career pathways for students who start on the non-credit ramp. As a result, the colleges are now providing students with stacked credentials, ensuring prior learning and experience is accounted for within pathways, and are formally recognizing key milestones with credentials. All in all, the colleges smoothed the way for students to work toward an associate degree even if they began their studies in a non-credit program.

The results of this work are promising. As you will learn in this issue brief, according to the Northeast Resiliency Consortium Final Evaluation Report, a higher percentage of students enrolled in continuing education to credit pathways banked or earned credits, transitioned to credit-based programs, and gained and were retained in employment than a matched comparison group who did not enroll in these pathways.

Achieving the Dream wishes to thank the colleges involved in the Northeast Resiliency Consortium for their commitment to helping their students pursue their educational goals. Achieving the Dream believes that this brief provides useful lessons for how colleges can make career and guided pathways a whole college solution to meeting students' academic and career goals.

Dr. Karen A. Stout, President and CEO  
Achieving the Dream

# Introduction

Driven in large part by economic mobility factors and concerns about global competition, policy leaders at the local, state, and national levels are setting goals to increase postsecondary credential attainment. In 2009, President Obama challenged all Americans to commit to at least one year of postsecondary training or education, and set a national goal of 5 million community and technical college graduates with associate degrees or certificates by 2020. To aid in this effort, in 2010 Congress appropriated \$2 billion over four years for the U.S. Department of Labor to fund the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Grant Program. The goal of this program is to help America's community colleges and other higher education institutions drive changes in designing and delivering programs that provide career pathways to good jobs for adult workers, and meet employer needs for highly skilled workers in growth industries.

Recent data from the National Student Clearinghouse (as cited in American Association of Community Colleges Fast Facts, 2017) show enrollment in non-credit programs hovers around 41% of all enrollment in the two-year sector, which is about five million participants nationally.<sup>1</sup> At many two-year

colleges, non-credit education students outnumber credit students.<sup>2</sup> A 2016 Adult Education and Training Survey from the US Department of Education found that 27% of adults have a non-degree postsecondary certificate, a certification, or a license; and about 80% of adults with a non-degree credential reported it was very useful for getting a job, keeping a job, and remaining marketable to employers.<sup>3</sup>

These data underscore the importance of non-degree programs, which are generally offered as non-credit by community and technical colleges through continuing education and workforce development departments and divisions.

Throughout this Issue Brief, we use the terms “non-credit” and “continuing education” or “workforce development” interchangeably to refer to short-term education and training

programs at community colleges that are delivered outside the traditional credit-based educational infrastructure. These non-credit programs typically are disconnected from college credit-based programs, and operate outside the traditional postsecondary education infrastructure of credits, credentials, and diplomas. This disconnection results in lost opportunities for millions of students whose postsecondary educational journey consists of chunks of short-term training interspersed with employment.

---

**“This model has helped workforce training participants who were initially focused only on employment outcomes, see themselves as college students. The model has been successfully applied across Center for Economic and Workforce Development programs and has helped participants earn credits which kick-start their paths to a college degree.”**

- Alissa Levine  
NRC Program Director  
Kingsborough Community College

1 American Association of Community Colleges, 2016  
<https://www.aacc.nche.edu/research-trends/fast-facts/>

2 Van Noy, M., Jacobs, J., Korey, S., Bailey, T., and Hughes, K. L. (2008). *Noncredit enrollment in workforce education: State policies and community college practices* (Report). Washington, DC: American Association of Community College and Community College Research Center.

3 Cronen, S., McQuiggan, M., and Isenberg, E. (2017). *Adult Training and Education: Results from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2016* (NCES 2017-103), National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC. Retrieved September 27, 2017, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.

These students—often thought of as non-traditional because they work while in college, attend part-time, and have families they support—could benefit from coherent career pathways with stacked and latticed credentials that articulate between continuing education and workforce development programs, and credit-based programs. Career pathways are a sequence of specific courses that result in a series of stackable credentials that align with employment opportunities and economic mobility within targeted industries, and that lead to technical diplomas and associate’s degrees.

In 2013 seven community colleges in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York formed the Northeast Resiliency Consortium (NRC) supported by a four-year TAACCCT grant, to expand and enhance education and training programs to close the skills gap in healthcare, information technology, hospitality, and environmental science. A significant component of this effort was to align continuing education and credit programs along a career pathway to better meet student and labor market needs. In addition to articulating these non-credit education and training programs with credit programs, NRC colleges provided wrap-around, comprehensive support services to provide career and job preparation guidance; personal supports like food assistance, childcare, and transportation; and academic supports to assist students with program content and competencies. These articulated pathways between continuing education and workforce development programs, and credit programs yielded positive educational and employment outcomes for participants.<sup>4</sup>

In this Issue Brief, we lay out the national context around career and guided pathways, and the value of including non-credit continuing education and workforce development programs, explore the NRC strategy of linking continuing education and credit programs, highlight success stories from NRC colleges, and provide initial lessons for implementation success.

4 Price, D.V., Childress, L., Sedlak, W., and Roach, R. (October 2017). *Northeast Resiliency Consortium Final Evaluation Report*. Indianapolis and Philadelphia: DVP-PRAXIS LTD and Equal Measure. All figures in this Brief use data from this final evaluation report unless otherwise noted.

## Career and Guided Pathways

Career pathways are a popular model of community college program reform intended to increase accreditation, program efficiency, and academic path clarity for students. The goal of career pathways is to connect education and training programs and support services that help individuals secure employment within an industry or occupational sector, and advance to successively higher levels of education and employment in that sector.<sup>5</sup> According to the National Skills Coalition, well-designed career pathways include support services that enable low-income, and often low-skilled, adults to persist and succeed in postsecondary education and training programs including, for example, career and financial aid counseling, childcare assistance, and transportation assistance.<sup>6</sup>

The recent emergence of “guided pathways” builds on the idea of transparent and clear course sequencing that is a core feature of career pathways. However, this effort focuses more broadly on academic majors and disciplines in the liberal arts, social sciences, and humanities that typically considered transfer programs that prepare two-year students to continue to a four-year college or university and beyond. The premise driving “guided pathways” is that students do not understand which courses they need to take to earn an associate’s degree, or how these courses and programs connect with careers and further education.<sup>7</sup> To address this knowledge gap, “guided pathways” streamline academic course sequences by building meta-majors that clearly map to different academic pathways and disciplines, so students can easily discern the courses they need to take and when. Through this process, students limit the accumulation of unnecessary credits that lengthen the time to degree and hinder the attainment of postsecondary credentials. This structure is a departure from the traditional

5 Jenkins, D. (2006). *Career Pathways: Aligning Public Resources to Support Individual and Economic Advancement in the Knowledge Economy*. Workforce Strategy Center.

6 National Skills Coalition (September 2017). *Investing in Postsecondary Career Pathways*. Washington, DC.

7 Davis Jenkins, Hana Lahr, John Fink, (2017) *Implementing Guided Pathways: Early Insights from the AACC Pathways Colleges*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

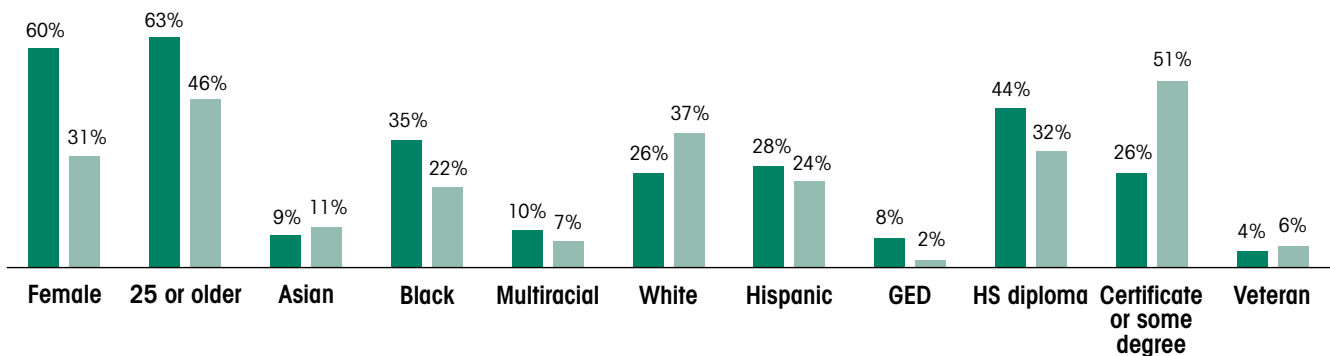
“self-service” or “cafeteria-model” of course offerings, in which students pick from a broad platter of courses which often lacks easily discernable paths to accreditation.<sup>8</sup>

## Incorporating Continuing Education and Workforce Development Programs along a Career or Guided Pathway

The integration of continuing education and workforce development programs into these career and guided pathways is often overlooked, as pathways discussions implicitly center around matriculated students in credit-based programs who are often younger students enrolling directly from high school. By comparison, continuing education and workforce development students tend to be older and more demographically diverse, and many are incumbent workers who return to college to upskill and gain credentials to improve their economic mobility. The participants in the NRC continuing education programs bear out this diversity. As Figure 1 shows, a greater proportion of continuing education participants is female, 25 years or older, and Black, compared with credit participants. In contrast, more credit students than continuing education students are White, male, and younger than 25. The other notable difference is in prior creden-

tial received: more than 50% of continuing education participants had earned only a GED or high school diploma prior to starting the NRC program, compared with 51% of credit participants who had completed some college or received a certificate.

As Macomb Community College president emeritus Jim Jacobs noted, “Non-credit students invest their time and energy in learning new skills, but they cannot parlay that investment into the certificates and degrees offered by the for-credit side of the house.”<sup>9</sup> Continuing education students stand to benefit substantially from clear and efficient pathways, and colleges linking continuing education programs with credit-based programs can generate transparent on-ramps for this older and more diverse student population. Notably, the NRC demonstrated that with minimal adjustments to the pathways structure, community college systems can incorporate mechanisms to efficiently integrate non-traditional students and continuing education programs into career pathways, ensuring that prior experience is accounted for within a pathway, and providing stacked credentials from continuing education to credit programs to formally recognize milestones along a credentialing spectrum.



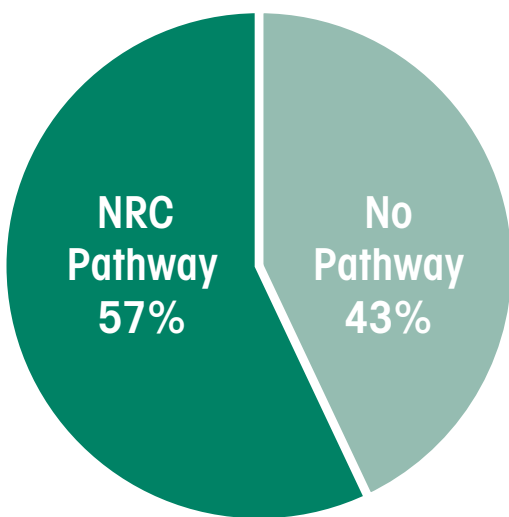
**Figure 1:** A greater proportion of **NRC continuing education participants** is female, 25 years or older, Black, and has a high school diploma as highest prior credential than **credit participants**.

8 Bailey, T., Jaggars, S. S., and Jenkins, D., (2015) *What We Know about Guided Pathways*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

9 Jacobs, J. and Teahen, R. 1997. “Shadow College and NCA Accreditation: A Conceptual Framework.” *NCA Quarterly*. Vol. 71, No. 4.

# The NRC Strategy: Creating Pathways from Continuing Education to Credit

The NRC created and formalized 25 pathways between continuing education and credit programs by addressing institutional and programmatic articulation agreements to provide credits for continuing education students who matriculate into credit-based programs at their respective colleges. Continuing education to credit pathways served 1,594 participants during the NRC, representing 57% of all continuing education and workforce development program participants (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** NRC Continuing Education Participants in Pathways

Emerging research on career pathways suggests these types of programs can yield better education and employment opportunities for students, especially low-skilled adults who need new skills to compete for jobs in a high-tech economy.<sup>10</sup> NRC

10 See for example, Alssid, J. L., Gruber, D., Jenkins, D., Mazzeo, C., Roberts, B., and Stanback, R. (2002, August). *Building a career pathways system: Promising practices in community college-centered workforce development*. New York: Workforce Strategy Center; and, Helmer, M., and Blair, A. (2011, February). *Courses to employment: Initial education and employment outcomes findings for students enrolled in Carreras en Salud Healthcare Career Training 2005–2009*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute.

colleges offered 44 continuing education programs. In addition, the colleges sought to provide stacked and latticed credentials, with the goal of accelerating time to credential attainment and increasing credential completion rates by articulating competencies and courses between continuing education and credit programs. Notably, all NRC colleges developed formal continuing education to credit program links, effectively building on-ramps to credit programs of study from non-credit, shorter-term training opportunities. A majority (75%) of continuing education to credit pathway participants enrolled in healthcare programs (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Pathway Participants by Sector

The primary obstacle to linking continuing education programs with the credit side of the college is the lack of recognized mechanisms for assessing the competencies and skills imparted by non-credit courses in ways that enable comparisons with for-credit courses. Departments and instructors want assurances that non-credit courses meet their standards for prerequisites or degree fulfillment. As a response to this issue, NRC colleges pursued several approaches to articulating their continuing education programming with credit programs, often with the support and guidance of non-credit and for-credit instructors. Strategies included third-party certification, Prior Learning Assessments (PLA)<sup>11</sup>, and matriculation requirements. Across these strat-

11 Nan L. Travers, advisor to the NRC, defines PLA as the “process by which verifiable learning acquired outside of traditional learning environments is assessed for college-level credit.”



egies, NRC colleges developed formal policies and procedures to articulate the skills and credentials earned in continuing education programs to award credits for students who want to continue their education and training on the credit side of the college. Four different approaches were implemented and are described in more detail below:

- **Matriculation Only:** Kingsborough Community College and Passaic County Community College utilized internal articulation agreements with credit programs that allow students to receive credit for their continuing education training after matriculating in an aligned college-level credit-granting program at the same institution. No other assessment is required.
- **Internal PLA:** Atlantic Cape Community College used the successful completion of industry-recognized certification exams by its continuing education students to automatically award credits in a new Health Sciences Pathway Degree program. Students are not required to matriculate into a degree program to receive these credits.
- **External PLA:** Housatonic Community College used a third-party accredited institution in Connecticut, Charter Oaks State College, to review continuing education courses and programs, and to establish credit equivalencies. Once these credit equivalencies are established, students can pay a fee to Charter Oaks to award these credits on an official transcript. These credits are awarded independently of matriculation, and can be transferred to a credit program at Housatonic Community College if they choose to enroll.
- **Matriculation + PLA:** LaGuardia Community College, Capital Community College, and Housatonic Community College pathways required a combination of either internal or external PLA and matriculation into a credit program. In these pathways, students must matriculate to receive credit toward a credit program at the same institution, and must also

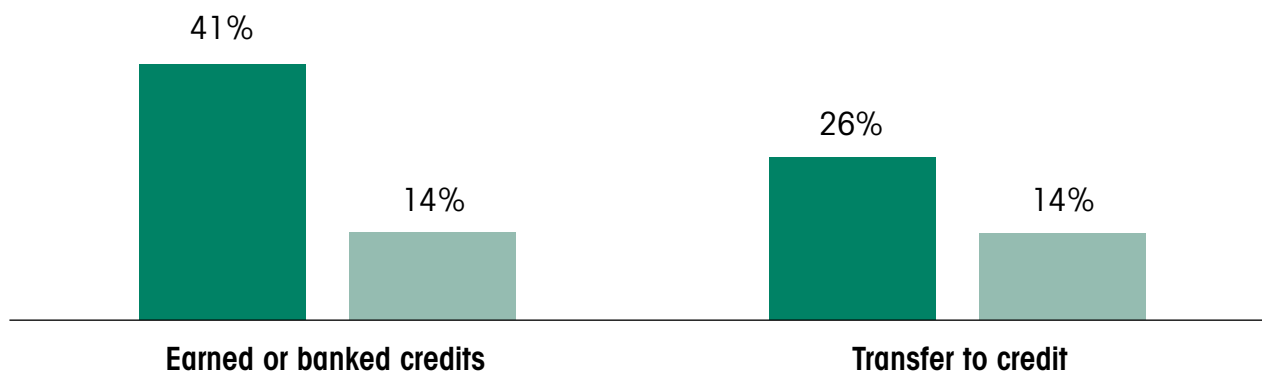
demonstrate proficiency through a portfolio review, challenge exam, or the receipt of an industry-recognized credential. In some cases, credit for the continuing education training is awarded only after a student has completed a certain number of credits in the program.

The evidence for the impact of these strategies on participants' transition into credit programs is compelling. According to the *Northeast Resiliency Consortium Final Evaluation Report*, **a higher percentage of participants in continuing education to credit pathways banked or earned credits, and transitioned into credit-based programs, than did a matched comparison group who did not enroll in these pathways:**

- 41% of continuing education participants who enrolled in a non-credit to credit pathway earned or banked credits that can be applied to additional educational pursuits, compared with 14% of the matched comparison group; and

- 26% of continuing education participants who enrolled in a non-credit to credit pathway transitioned into a credit-based program, compared with 14% of the matched comparison group.

Additionally, an analysis of employment outcomes showed that 24% of participants in continuing education to credit pathways who were unemployed when they began their NRC programs gained employment one quarter after program exit; and of those who were employed one quarter after program exit, 67% were still employed three quarters after program exit. These outcomes were statistically significant and higher than the 14% and 50% of participants not in these pathways who were, respectively, employed one quarter after exit and retained in employment three quarters after exit.



**Figure 4: Pathway Participant and No Pathway Comparison Group Academic Outcomes**

In the next section of this Issue Brief, we highlight three NRC colleges that collectively served 77% of all NRC participants enrolling in continuing education to credit pathways: Atlantic Cape Community College in New Jersey, Housatonic Community

College in Connecticut, and Kingsborough Community College in New York. We conclude the Brief with lessons for the field about implementing and sustaining continuing education to credit pathways.



# Atlantic Cape Community College

## Leveraging Industry Certifications to Award Credit for Prior Learning

Atlantic Cape Community College (Atlantic Cape) used nationally recognized industry certifications as the basis for credit equivalencies, rather than the workforce development program curriculum taught at the college. Generally, these industry certifications are needed for employment, and the college's workforce development programs are designed to prepare students for these exams. During the NRC, 198 participants enrolled in healthcare programs that were eligible for the new Prior Learning Assessment policy at Atlantic Cape, with 19% transitioning into a credit program at the college.

In fall of 2018, after passing industry-recognized healthcare certification exams, students will be eligible for credit in a newly created health sciences program at Atlantic Cape. This program was created in response to the high student demand for other health care degree options, and will provide students who were not initially accepted to reapply for the nursing program, or an opportunity to apply their prior learning from a different healthcare program.

Thomas Edison State University evaluated several industry certifications, which mapped to ten NRC healthcare programs at Atlantic Cape. The number of credits possible to earn for passing the certification exam will range from 3-17 credits, and will vary by type of certification received. Most programs will not articulate at a course-by-course level, and will instead come in as program elective credits in the health sciences pathways program.

During the NRC, participants who could be awarded these credits by Atlantic Cape were enrolled

in several healthcare programs, including Central Service Technician, EKG Monitor Technician, Emergency Medical Technician, Medical Assistant, Patient Care Technician, and Phlebotomy. This policy change to articulate credits from workforce development programs was formalized near the end of the grant period, so students have yet to take advantage of this policy. Currently enrolled students who

were informed of the opportunity expressed interest, and Atlantic Cape plans to follow up with students who completed workforce development programs during the NRC to let them know about the new health sciences pathway and the credits they have earned.

NRC project leaders at Atlantic Cape reported

that the new workforce development to credit pathways were the most important accomplishment achieved during the grant. By basing credits on the competencies and skills measured through industry certifications, they gained buy-in from healthcare program faculty and department chairs, and thereby expedited the PLA policy approval process. Another factor that contributed to this policy and practice change was the support of the vice president of academic affairs and dean of career education; and that, organizationally, both workforce development and credit programs report to the Academic Affairs department. This organizational structure signals a "one college" philosophy that workforce training programs and credit programs are equally critical to serving Atlantic Cape's students.

**"Atlantic Cape's PLA program provides our constituents the opportunity to earn college credits for their experiential learning. For many, this is the gateway into higher education, and for most, it is the most efficient pathway to a college degree."**

- Dr. Otto Hernandez

Vice President of Academic Affairs  
Atlantic Cape Community College

# Housatonic Community College

## Sector-based Approaches to Award Credit for Prior Learning

Housatonic Community College (HCC) pursued two distinct strategies to connect continuing education and credit programs at the college: (1) utilizing a third-party, accredited institution (Charter Oaks State College) to identify credit equivalencies for continuing education healthcare programs; and (2) developing internal articulation agreements in Information Technology programs that leverage

**“Non-credit to credit just makes sense. It creates a path for non-traditional students to achieve milestones one step at a time.”**

-Alese Mulvihill

Project Director, Housatonic Community College

continuing education training at the college along with industry recognized credentials. During the NRC, 367 participants enrolled in programs with transparent continuing education to credit pathways at HCC—89% in health-care and 11% in IT— with 15% earning or banking credits to use later in a credit program and 17% transitioning into a credit program at the college.



HCC worked with Charter Oaks State College to conduct course assessments for non-credit programming; this process—known as CCAP—was applied to five continuing education healthcare programs offered by the college during the NRC grant: Pharmacy Technician, Patient Care Technician, Certified Nursing Assistant, Community Health Worker, and Professional Medical Coder. The CCAP process involves faculty who evaluate the courses in these continuing education programs by reviewing syllabi, course outlines, textbooks, resources, and lesson plans to determine credit equivalencies. Once established, students can be awarded these credit equivalencies after submitting necessary paperwork to Charter Oaks, and paying a fee of \$75. These credits are on an official transcript, and can be applied toward a degree program at HCC should a student enroll.

HCC also developed an internal articulation agreement between continuing education information technology programs offered during the NRC grant and the college's Computer Information Sciences (CIS) program. This effort was led by a CIS faculty member who reviewed the continuing education curriculum and documented how it aligned with the associate's degree offered by the college. This internal articulation agreement awards college credit to students who complete continuing education programs in Networking or Repair, if they complete the course(s) and earn the industry-recognized Comp TIA A+ certification, Comp TIA Network + certification, or Comp TIA Security + certification. Students who matriculate into a credit-based CIS

program will earn three or four credits—depending on which certifications they earned—after completing nine credits in an associate's degree program.

In short, HCC implemented two formal processes for students during the NRC: an external credit equivalency policy for continuing education

healthcare programs, and an internal articulation agreement for continuing education IT programs. Project leaders expect both continuing education to credit pathways to be sustained, and report they were an important contribution of the grant to overall institutional priorities.

HCC experienced significant leadership changes during the NRC grant. The academic dean, continuing education dean, and student services dean departed, and a new president was hired.

These transitions created an opportunistic environment during the grant for project leaders and staff to develop and implement innovative programs—including continuing education to credit pathways—and to build support among faculty and new administrative leaders about the importance of having formal and transparent connections between continuing education and credit programs. The project team developed a “how to” manual for faculty to guide the development of additional internal articulation agreements, and expanded the third-party credit equivalency process to additional Allied Health programs. The president, academic and student services administrators, project leaders, faculty, and staff almost universally indicated that expanding continuing education to credit pathways at the college was an institutional priority.

---

**“I must say that many positive outputs came from our efforts. A user group was established, course upgrades were undertaken, new courses were developed, and specialized technology certifications were established. The crown jewel was the acceptance of national certifications, as the equivalent of credit courses, in our IS catalog of course offerings.**

-Tom Wagner

CIS Faculty, Housatonic Community College

# Kingsborough Community College

## Credit Banking and Internal Articulation Agreements to Award Credit for Prior Learning

Kingsborough Community College (KBCC) used credit banking to award credit for prior learning during the NRC grant period. Credit banking is a formal program-level agreement at KBCC that allows students to “bank” credits after completing continuing education programs and use them when they matriculate at the college. This policy existed prior to the NRC grant and was considered a best practice by the college’s Center for Economic and Workforce Development (CEWD), which facilitated and negotiated these internal articulation agreements for NRC programs of study in the departments of tourism, hospitality, and healthcare. CEWD worked with the reg-

istrar to formalize these agreements and protect against potential institutional changes that could affect credit banking in the future.

**“As a growing number of community colleges are conceiving guided career pathways, it is very pleasing to see the work that KBCC was able to implement through the NRC to provide guided pathways from continuing education to credit. Two NRC graduates, both with GPAs eligible for the Honors Program at Kingsborough, are now enrolled in our innovative Customer Experience Management Academy, with the opportunity to combine their college education with gainful employment at our corporate partnership sites.”**

- Dr. Reza Fakhari

Vice President of the Office of Continuing Education  
Workforce Development and Strategic Community Partnerships  
Kingsborough Community College

During the NRC grant period, 660 participants enrolled in continuing education to credit pathways at KBCC—49% in healthcare and 51% in hospitality—with 77% earning or banking credits to use later in a credit program, and 40% transitioning into a credit program at the college.

Five NRC programs at KBCC incorporated credit banking: Certified Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counseling, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Community Health Worker, Food Service Upgrade, and Culinary Arts. These programs were well-es-

tablished prior to the NRC grant. In many cases, the continuing education programs have credit-granting degree counterparts with identical curricula taught by the same faculty. This helped facilitate the credit banking agreements for these NRC programs. Once the student matriculates into the articulated KBCC program, they are awarded these credits, generally as elective credits toward a major in the respective department. In some cases, these credits can apply to specific courses or modules within the program (e.g., EMT students who matriculate into the paramedic program receive six credits that comprise the EMT portion of the paramedic program of study).





Credit banking occurred in two ways across these programs: either through an arrangement with the bursar's office and academic affairs or through the program design either as a dual enrollment program—non-degree or degree—or through entering with credits through a past certification. The agreement to engage in credit banking happens either between two programs that offer non-credit options through CEWD, or between programs in a department that has both CEWD and continuing education programs of study. Credit banking has been more successful and quickly implemented by departments with which CEWD has strong pre-existing relationships, such as Tourism and Hospitality.

Interviewees reported that credit banking provided students more confidence and encouragement to continue their education (either immediately after completion or after some career building), and particularly, to continue that education at KBCC. This is beneficial for KBCC's enrollment and could build broader support for credit banking as an institution-wide policy.

# Lessons from the Northeast Resiliency Consortium:

## Linking Continuing Education and Credit-Based Programs

Community colleges in the NRC demonstrated that creating formal pathways between continuing education and credit-based programs is not only desirable but practical and has positive benefits for students and the college. As summarized in this Issue Brief, almost three times as many students in NRC colleges who enrolled in continuing education programs earned or banked credits and almost twice as many matriculated into a credit-based program than did a statistically matched comparison group. Students made progress toward degrees, and colleges experienced increased transitions from their continuing education programs into credit-based programming. Students in these pathways were more likely to become employed one quarter after program exit, and retained in employment three quarters after program exit.

For colleges wanting to implement and sustain continuing education to credit pathways, evidence from the NRC suggests the following actions can facilitate their efforts:

- 1. Seek executive-level support to create formal, internal articulation agreements between continuing education and credit programs.** Ideally, these agreements would reflect an overarching institutional priority, though at a minimum, executive-level support can facilitate collaboration between academic program deans and continuing education deans, and allow for program-level internal articulation to be developed and approved.
- 2. Align continuing education curricula with existing credit-based program curricula.** Continuing education programming should, whenever possible, reflect existing learning outcomes and competencies taught in credit-based programs. One of the strengths of continuing education is the flexibility and

nimbleness to quickly create programs that meet employer and labor market demands. Ensuring that continuing education programs teach the same competencies as credit programs—albeit in different formats and on different timelines— can facilitate the acceptance and approval of continuing education to credit pathways.

- 3. Engage full-time credit faculty in creating the curriculum and competencies for continuing education programs.** Colleges have faculty with a vested interest in program quality. Leveraging faculty expertise to develop and package continuing education curricula can build support for, and reduce resistance to, policy and practice changes to award credit for students who compete continuing education courses and programs, and who later enroll in credit-based programs.
- 4. Offer professional development to continuing education and credit-based faculty around the shared competencies taught in both types of courses.** The real test of quality curricula rests with the quality of the instruction. Accordingly, to ensure high quality instruction in continuing education programs, colleges should provide professional development opportunities for both continuing education and credit-based faculty. Shared professional development establishes common expectations of quality for all instructors, while building relationships between full-time credit-based program faculty and adjunct, part-time faculty who typically teach continuing education courses and programs. This professional development can also lead to a more seamless transition between continuing education and credit pathways for students.



**5. Collect and report data on students who use continuing education to credit linkages and matriculate into credit programs and earn degrees.** Breaking down silos between continuing education and credit-based programs can be facilitated by collecting and reporting data on the educational outcomes of students who begin their academic journey in continuing education programs. Positive outcomes for these students can strengthen institutional support from administrative and faculty leaders, and weaker outcomes can be used to improve the quality of continuing education to credit pathways.

Exploratory analysis provided in the NRC final evaluation report further suggests that the “matriculation only” approach is the most effective tool for colleges wanting to build continuing education to credit pathways, and thereby improve transitions between non-credit and credit programming at

their institutions. For example, 71% of NRC continuing education participants in “matriculation only” pathways earned or banked credits—an amount almost three times greater than any other approach. Similarly, 38% of NRC continuing education participants in “matriculation only” pathways transitioned into a credit-based program, which is at least twice as high as any other approach. These data suggest that colleges should consider eliminating unnecessary barriers for students who complete non-credit, continuing education and workforce development programs at their colleges. These barriers include challenge exams and portfolio reviews, and third-party services that award credit equivalencies. Eliminating these unnecessary hurdles will further facilitate both credit accumulation and transitions into credit-bearing programs for students who begin in continuing education.



## **ABOUT ACHIEVING THE DREAM**

Achieving the Dream (ATD) leads a growing network of more than 220 community colleges committed to helping their students, particularly low-income students and students of color, achieve their goals for academic success, personal growth, and economic opportunity. ATD is making progress closing achievement gaps and accelerating student success through a unique change process that builds each college's institutional capacities in seven essential areas. ATD and more than 100 experienced coaches and advisors work closely with Network colleges in 39 states and the District of Columbia to reach more than 4 million community college students.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ACHIEVING THE DREAM:**

Visit [www.AchievingtheDream.org](http://www.AchievingtheDream.org)  
or contact us at [info@AchievingtheDream.org](mailto:info@AchievingtheDream.org)  
or call 240-450-0075

Follow us on Twitter @AchieveTheDream