

THE HIDDEN COLLEGE:
NONCREDIT EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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Introduction

Participation in learning is setting new participation records and recent trends suggest that even greater participation is to come. These activities range from formal, instructor-led classes to informal, work-related learning. Learners seek to acquire knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the workforce, to earn a college or advanced degree, to learn basic skills or English language skills, or simply to enrich their lives. Fueled by an expanding adult population, increased competition for jobs in the global marketplace, and strong connections between education and income, the need to learn throughout one's life has never been more imperative.

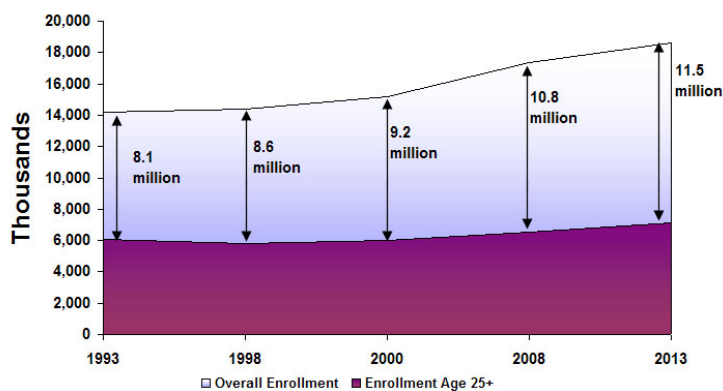
These are exciting times to be a learner. Existing and emerging institutions, organizations, and companies compete for learners with a wide range of classes, programs, and activities across a seemingly endless menu of learning options. Nearly half of all American adults take advantage of these opportunities in formal learning pathways while still another large segment pursues learning that is less structured. Whether learning is directed formally by an instructor in a classroom or directed informally by learners themselves, it is undeniable that the national appetite for learning is large and drives an expanding market place.

Good public policy encourages expanded learning. The connections between an educated citizenry and economic vitality and quality of life are inescapable. The global economy continues to ignore workers with minimal skills. Continuous learning and training is critical for all employees and their employers. Not only must states and the federal government articulate a vision that supports this stance, they also must close the demonstrated gaps in learning that hinder that vision. This requires a clear understanding of the types of learners now engaged in acquiring skills as well as those who are not yet participating. It also requires an assessment of learning providers and how they might contribute to a learning agenda. Better information always requires commitment .

Unfortunately, a very large slice of the learning marketplace operates beyond the view of public policy. Here, we refer to noncredit programs operating under the aegis of traditional higher education institutions. These programs purportedly serve million of learners each year, but no one knows their full scope. No national data exists that traces the types of programs that attract learners nor what that volume may be. Consequently, there is no appreciation of how noncredit learning might fit a public agenda. Instead, when higher education is invited to the policy table, the focus is limited to credit programs and degrees. Much is missing in this dialog, so much so that we label this phenomenon the "Hidden College."

The Hidden College masks higher education's contribution to the learning market. We know that there are about 17 million students enrolled in credit programs in American higher education, a figure representing just 18 percent of the estimated pool of 97 million adult learners. Overall enrollments are expected to grow sharply during the next 10 years. But, the share of adult learners is expected to grow only slightly.

Trends in Overall and Adult Higher Education Credit Enrollment



Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2003, September). Projections of Education Statistics to 2013. Table 13. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office

Unaccounted enrollments would seem to drive higher education's share to a higher level. The hidden nature of the noncredit enterprise means that little is known about these enrollments except by the programs that produce them. Anecdotal evidence places noncredit enrollments on equal footing with credit enrollments. For example, the American Association of Community Colleges projects noncredit enrollments in community colleges at 5 million learners, on par with 5.5 million enrollments in credit programs.¹ But, only a handful of states require higher education to report noncredit enrollments, placing these estimates near the line that separates speculation from research. Lack of enrollment data and corresponding profiles of learners in noncredit classes conspire in the "Hidden College."

The Hidden College's long shadow casts doubts on state and national learning policies. Substantially more is known about K through 12 enrollments across the United States than about total enrollment in higher education. The ability to reasonably forecast trends and to direct dollars to meet policy objectives for ensuring a well-educated workforce are forfeit to incomplete information. Meager data about total adult learning can only cloud emerging attempts by states to plan for the lifelong learning necessary for their long-term economic health. The federal government also largely ignores noncredit education both in rhetoric and financing higher education.

The Hidden College also hampers institutions. While future enrollment in noncredit programs may offset the stagnant growth forecast for adult learners in credit programs, significant obstacles first must be overcome. The noncredit program often is isolated from the credit side of the institution and these rarely come together to create new options for learning that might collectively capture future enrollment. The fragmented culture of most institutions and the perception that noncredit programs are somehow second class contribute to this disunity.

To be sure, there are distinct advantages for institutions in maintaining the separateness of credit and noncredit programs. Coherence is not chief among them, however. If institutional leaders expect noncredit classes and programs to make up for the enrollment shortfalls predicted for adult learners, a close examination is needed of the boundary lines, some real and some imagined, that separate non-credit programs from their credit-bearing counterparts.

Noncredit programs traditionally have been the orphans of higher education. Their critics associate them with recreational basket weaving and cake baking. These old myths live on, but do not fully match current practice. While there are some hobby courses, the majority of the noncredit world includes work-related classes to prepare learners for license examinations, upgrade job skills, retrain for new occupations, and leveraged training classes that are customized for a particular industry. Courses and programs found in contemporary noncredit education bulletins include instruction in UNIX programming, construction management, international trade, Arabic for beginners, script writing, and basic medical terminology. Today's noncredit programming is just as likely to be on the cutting edge of employment markets by including emerging topics such as Six Sigma and courses leading to state-of-the-art industry certification as a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer. They also serve low-wage learners through basic skills courses, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and short-term employment training programs designed to satisfy the "work first" provisions of current federal welfare and workforce programs.

Designed to quickly meet learner or employer needs, noncredit programs do not adhere to the traditional academic term. Their autonomy frees them from the bureaucratic apparatus of course-design, program approval, and state oversight that bind the credit program. Without formal application processes to delay them, learners can enroll for noncredit classes just-in-time to meet their goals. This flexibility means that noncredit programming can respond quickly to learning markets, especially in emerging areas where the body of knowledge is not well-defined and where expertise is rare. Courses and other formal learning experiences are quickly added and removed. This nimbleness and freedom comes with a price, however.

If noncredit programs are the orphans of higher education, they may be the stepchildren within their own institutions. When they receive state funding, it is almost always less than that given to credit programs. Unlike the credit program, noncredit programs are faced with meeting some or all of their operating costs. At public institutions, noncredit programs are divorced from the production of credit hours that drive state allocations. Autonomy in course design and delivery further isolates noncredit courses from the credit producing side. The typical slow pace of academic decision-making process is anathema to most noncredit operations and serves as incentive for noncredit administrators to place additional firewalls around the Hidden College.

Even when the noncredit and credit programs share a working relationship, other institutional barriers to serving learning markets are at work. Despite their narrow focus and therefore shorter time duration, both noncredit and credit classes equate time with learning. The measurement of the time that students occupy classroom chairs, or "seat-time" as its known in most state funding allocation schemes, is only a poor proxy for documenting student learning.

Unfortunately, most traditional higher education institutions do not get beyond this mindset. Their competitors learned some time ago the advantages of describing units by competencies first and seat time second. Adult learners increasingly value both time and quality. They are unwilling to devote the time they have allocated to learning in inefficient ways. The extent to which noncredit programs mimic the time parameters of the credit program will determine how well they respond to future competition.

Noncredit programs also attract social critics. The link between the chronic underfunding and purported outcomes of noncredit programs that seek to aid adults wishing to enter credit programs and those that work with other low-income populations is used to illustrate a widening class system in higher education.² This argument suggests that noncredit classes and accompanying support services cannot be effective at funding levels that are meager even by the standards of the community colleges that operate them. Perceptions of quality are tied to the most expensive, private institutions and that those that receive the lowest public support oftentimes are accorded the lowest public confidence. This hierarchy is not always supported by fact and the absence of hard data outcomes for noncredit programs that serve low-income learners certainly perpetuates misperceptions, keeping these programs at the bottom of the academic food chain. Ironically, the overall effect of social criticism may be to increase the distance between credit and noncredit programs even further, perpetuating a false dichotomy that serves no one, especially learners, well.

Noncredit and credit programs alike benefit from knowing what trends are emerging in the education marketplace and using that information to respond. To compete for learners requires institutions to harvest information and to make active commitments to turning that information into action. The Internet has made access to learning options more available, freeing learners and learning providers alike from the barriers of the standard instructional day and academic term. Global economic competition coupled with movement toward job segmentation makes work-related skills critically important for employees and employers alike. These shifts require a corresponding shift for institutions. Noncredit programs can be at the forefront of propelling this change.

Our bias is that more information about noncredit activity would serve all stakeholders. We carry that forward throughout in this report. We also argue that the separation of credit programs from their noncredit counterparts in traditional institutions of higher education appears in many ways to be artificial and may explain, in part, higher education's relatively low penetration of the potential learning market. More knowledge about the Hidden College can support a national learning agenda as well as help institutions seek resources needed to support that agenda.

We use the results of a first-of-its-kind national study funded by the Lumina Foundation and conducted by HigherEd.Org as well as other recent research to fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge. This project involved surveys of institutions, state agencies, and federal agencies as well as interviews with experts in noncredit education. Technical details and more methodological issues than those presented here appear in the appendices to this report.

The Coin of the Realm

The credit hour has been the coin of the realm in higher education for more than 100 years. The move away from a single course of study in colleges and universities toward a system in which students could choose different courses of study made necessary a way of measuring whether they were equivalent. A second cause was the wide variation in secondary school preparation that complicated the college admissions process. The Carnegie Unit, named for its association with the Carnegie Foundation, was developed to ensure that entering students had roughly the same preparation. It provided uniformity calculating the number of hours students spent in class and the amount of homework assigned. Entering freshmen were expected to have completed 14 "units" of academic preparation before entering the college or university. This time-based system, in turn, spilled over to the management of college and university curricula where credit "units" became credit "hours."

The use of credit hours is entrenched firmly throughout higher education. It is the basic element of state allocations to public institutions. Inside institutions, it is a key element in determining faculty and student workloads. Credit hours also serve as a uniform measure of the steps learners take toward a degree; completion of 30 credit hours at most institutions operating on a semester calendar, for example, is equated with completing one year of study toward a bachelor's degree that might consist of 120 credit hours. Credit hours are also used to determine the amount of financial aid for which a student might be entitled. A full-time student, for example, typically takes more than 12 credit hours each term and that threshold qualifies her or him for full-time financial aid status. Ultimately, and perhaps without much examination of what occurs in individual courses and programs, credit hours are equated to learning.³

Red tape has encircled the credit hour, prolonging its existence as a unit of learning activity. The federal government requires that credit enrollments be reported to its Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) before institutions can participate in student financial aid programs. Noncredit enrollments are excluded. While accrediting standards do not require institutions to follow the traditional Carnegie formula, they do require that institutions that base their credit hour assignments on factors other than seat time to have policies that explain and justify how they consistently reach sound decisions about how to recognize college learning. As a result, we know a considerable amount about the volume of credit activity across American higher education, but unwittingly little about the total scope of learning across higher education. Together, the federal government and regional accreditors nurture the use of the credit hour.

Defining Noncredit

Defining noncredit education seems straightforward. Anything that is not credit must be noncredit. Yet, to learners, institutions, administrators, and state agencies the term “noncredit” conveys different meanings in different environments. The HigherEd.Org survey asked respondents whether they agreed with 6 possible definitions for the term noncredit and found striking differences by institutional level and control. In part, these differences can be traced to the lack of uniform definitions for noncredit promulgated by state governing and coordinating boards (State Higher Education Executive Officers, or SHEEO’s). Less than half of state agencies surveyed indicated that their state published a definition of noncredit education, apparently leaving this latitude to institutions.

| | | % Not applicable to degree | % Not part of academic curriculum | % Offered through Cont. Ed. | % Not funded by formula | % Doesn't appear on transcript | % Contract for business & industry |
|-----------------|---------------------|---|--|--|--|---|---|
| Carnegie | | | | | | | |
| | Associates | 50.7 | 37.3 | 42.4 | 25.2 | 31.7 | 40.8 |
| | Baccalaureate | 45.0 | 15.6 | 14.2 | 6.4 | 13.8 | 10.1 |
| | Master's | 47.2 | 36.9 | 38.1 | 25.6 | 33.0 | 26.7 |
| | Research/Doctoral | 53.6 | 32.1 | 35.7 | 26.2 | 33.3 | 38.1 |
| Control | | | | | | | |
| | Private, for profit | 25.0 | 12.1 | 3.4 | 2.6 | 7.3 | 11.2 |
| | Private, non-profit | 40.1 | 19.8 | 19.3 | 7.6 | 16.8 | 9.5 |
| | Public | 60.9 | 45.1 | 54.0 | 34.8 | 42.1 | 50.4 |
| | Total | 45.7 | 28.5 | 30.3 | 17.6 | 25.2 | 26.2 |
| | SHEEOs | 77.6 | 35.8 | 49.1 | 34.0 | 35.8 | 43.4 |

With the possible exception of public institutions and SHEEO agencies, the definition “not applicable to a degree,” isn’t shared across those surveyed. The meaning of this is not clear, but it may signal that in institutional practice, the borders between noncredit and credit classes are more porous than state agencies believe. If this is correct, it appears that the practice of counting noncredit classes toward degrees, by whatever process, occurs most often in private institutions. Reinforcing this speculation is the relatively low agreement (less than one-third of institutional respondents) that noncredit courses are “not part of the academic curriculum.” Low agreement that noncredit courses are “offered through continuing education” suggests that noncredit programming is not assigned to one organizational entity as conventional wisdom might have it. While agreement with these statements varies between institutional level, sector, and control, taken as a whole they are mildly surprising. That is, if noncredit courses count toward degrees, are not automatically excluded from the academic area, and are offered through

units other than traditional continuing education offices, the boundaries that separate noncredit from credit are appear to be mostly procedural and not deeply rooted in institutional tradition.

Private for-profit institutions were the most reluctant to define noncredit education. Private for-profit and non-profit institutions were least likely to associate noncredit activity with contract training. This may reflect the private sector's lack of state support for noncredit activity in general. Perhaps if private institutions offer contract training it is almost always for credit. Baccalaureate level institutions appear similarly inclined to agree that contract training is noncredit. In fact, baccalaureate institutions appear to define noncredit education much differently than associate, masters, or research/doctoral level institutions. It is not possible to definitively account for these differences; they may be only semantical or they may be driven by financial definitions. However, collectively they suggest that the practice of providing noncredit education is neither consistent across American higher education nor uniform.

Noncredit's "Credit Hour"

The Carnegie Unit provides a time-linked benchmark for credit instruction. The corresponding framework for noncredit education is the continuing education credit (CEU). CEU's were created by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET) as a standard measurement of continuing education participation.⁴ CEU's form a national system that enables learners to transport noncredit work among multiple providers and employers in the same way that credit hours are transcribed. One (1) IACET CEU is equal to ten (10) contact hours of participation in an organized continuing education. In contrast, a credit hour usually represents 15 contact hours delivered in a standard academic term.

Not all institutions award or track CEU's. They originally were designed for professionals who have already attained a certain level of education and need to take a certain amount of continuing education and training per year to renew their license or certification, including engineers, human resources, early childhood education, teachers, allied health professions, and recreational therapists. The use of CEUs for teaching certification varies from state to state, but is particularly strong in Michigan and Massachusetts. Lawyers, social workers, physicians, and other healthcare professionals also use continuing education units for certification purposes, but these are regulated by respective professional bodies and are known by acronyms other than CEU.

Absent national or regional accreditation standards for noncredit providers, the CEU serves as a quality control. Participants in some noncredit programs have need for recognition of their individual efforts through the CEU. In other programs, the awarding of individual CEU's, especially when those classes are recreational in nature, is not necessary. There is no requirement that providers measure any of their noncredit activities by CEUs, but their use provides advantages for learners needing to transport their learning experiences among employers and other organizations. About 400 organizations including companies, regulatory boards, state governments, local school boards and other organizations accept the IACET CEU.

Those noncredit classes that do not lead to certification or employment advancement do not typically earn CEU's.

True Differences?

That the words *credit hour* and *credible* share an etymological root is no accident. The term "credit" conveys a sense of respectability. It is, after all, the building block for degrees at American colleges and universities. But, should these perceptions of credibility be the sole dividing line between credit and noncredit activities? Or, do other factors such as tradition, reimbursement rates, and campus culture determine which learning experiences are assigned to the credit side of an institution while other experiences are assigned to the noncredit realm? We argue that the boundaries in practice between credit and noncredit activities are thin and permeable and driven more by where dollars flow than by other barriers. Still, all barriers are significant and worth examination if the goal is to capture a share of the learning marketplace. Driven by changes in technology, access to information, learner lifestyles, and pedagogy, the rise in noncredit education represents an opportunity to examine fundamental questions about how institutions array their instructional programs and how learners access those programs. The explosion in learning options suggest a corresponding response from traditional higher education institutions. The time appears ripe for the Hidden College to become more visible.

It seems trite to again point out that noncredit activities do not generate college credit. However, not even CEU's--despite their uniform nature--translate automatically into college credit. Learners are disadvantaged by blanket policies that automatically dismiss CEU credits as potential units of collegiate level learning. Certainly, in an era of stable and diminishing adult enrollments in traditional higher education programs, institutions will want to take a hard look at policies that create artificial barriers that may not make sense amid today's realities. Better information about the learning behind both CEU's and credit hours would seem to make bridges between the two programs stronger.

Institutional culture tends to run contrary to a full partnership for noncredit programs, however. In community colleges, for example, the top of the typical food chain is represented by transfer programs followed by career and technical programs and remedial programs. The lowest positions on this pyramid is occupied by noncredit programs in general followed at the bottom by noncredit workforce development programs. Still there is suspicion. One respondent to the HigherEd.Org survey, a noncredit administrator at a community college, expressed frustration with educating academic divisions of her institution that noncredit programs are not a threat, "noncredit activity does not decimate academic programs because non-credit activity serves a different market segment." The effect of uncoordinated pursuit of the same markets by different units within the same institution can spell disaster.

We do not advocate for the automatic conversion of noncredit classes to credit. To do so would be foolhardy in an era when the quality of credit classes, themselves, is often debated. Rather, we suggest that institutions take proactive steps to ensure that the barriers between credit and noncredit courses do not artificially penalize noncredit students who wish to pursue a

degree. Below, we examine several national mechanisms that can assist institutions in determining the credibility of noncredit learning. We also note that institutions themselves sometimes need incentives to tackle these issues and that state policy can play a vital role in overcoming institutional inertia. For example, the state could create a financial incentive to reward institutions that grant credit to students whose learning outcomes are rigorously assessed after completing non-credit classes.

Several well-known paths exist for students and institutions to bridge this gulf. Both the American Council on Education (ACE) through its College Credit Recommendation Service and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) through its Prior Learning Assessment provide institutions and learners with vehicles to bridge the credibility gulf between credit and noncredit experiences. ACE's College Credit Recommendation service provides third-party reviews of corporate and military training programs, apprenticeship programs, and examination programs and recommends college credit for those who complete these experiences. ACE also recognizes more than 350 non-higher education providers of CEU's. ACE publishes several guides that provide institutions with a course-by-course description of non-credit provider, the course objectives, length and date of each course, instructional methods, and credit recommendation.⁵ ACE also maintains an on-line noncredit transcript service that allows learners to centralize their experiences in a single location.

CAEL advocates the use of assessment of prior learning in which students document their learning experiences for review by college officials. CAEL proposes methodology by which learning gained through an individual's life and work experience can be considered as credit. This process embraces learning that arises from a variety of sources, including work, hobbies, military service, and family responsibilities. Assessment of prior learning provides institutions with a consistent method to establish criteria for translating these experiences into credit based on exams, portfolios, or curriculum evaluation.

Noncredit's Competition

Competition for learners is everywhere. Where there are no clear boundaries, there are competitors operating across a wide landscape. Noncredit programs are found in private and public institutions, both nonprofit and for-profit. Competition for noncredit classes can come from within a given institution itself. The IPEDS universe consists mostly of institutions that register themselves to provide federal student financial aid and who are obligated to provide data on their credit programs to the federal government. Just as we know little about noncredit activity within that subset of the IPEDS universe, we know nothing about the activity of learning providers outside that universe.

More than half of all personal interest courses are offered by community centers, public libraries, private organizations, and religious organizations. These personal interest or recreational courses would not appear to compete with higher education's interest in noncredit programming. This is not to say that significant learning outcomes that might be recognized by the credit side of traditional higher education do not occur in selected avocational courses.

Genealogy classes, for example, may develop competencies in critical thinking, sociology, anthropology, and history that can have direct application in credit higher education.

A number of community-based organizations and public school districts provide instruction in remedial skills for adult learners. These organizations typically are not directly connected to an institution of higher education and so the experiences that are gained by program completers often do not translate into college credit. Higher education providers of ESL and basic skills education are more likely to be found in the nonprofit sector where they are eligible for public subsidy than in the for-profit center. Even with the current array of providers in the marketplace, some of whom offer instruction near to places where needy adults live, the national participation rates in remedial skills borders on the unseemly. Rates of participation for basic skills and ESL account for just 4 percent of overall adult participation in formal learning. In contrast, more than three times as many adults in the United States have either not completed the 9th grade (7.5%) or identify themselves as deficient in English (6.8%) as are enrolled in these courses.⁶

Higher education's competitors for work-related courses include business and industry, professional associations, government agencies and other organizations including community-based organizations, private instructors, or other organizations. Business and industry by itself spends massively on worker training, providing almost half of all work-related courses. How much of this activity is offered in partnership with higher education institutions or its mix of credit v. noncredit is unknown.⁷

The Hidden College competes against many for-profit providers that operate specialized programs that are not recognized by regional accreditors. These organizations choose, instead, to join alternative, national accrediting bodies whose purview is also limited to the same narrow range of specialized programs. With few exceptions, private for-profit providers offer more short-term, outcome-based programs than traditional higher education. The ability to compact learning options by for-profit providers stems from their focus on providing only a limited number of closely-aligned programs and not on a wide array of courses and programs common to public providers. The speed with which students can complete their program of study is a major draw, apparently overriding their concerns about higher tuition associated with this privilege. What we know about these institutions comes from their participation in the IPEDS data collection cycle, a requirement for their participation in federal student financial aid. There were 850,000 million enrollments in these institutions in fall 2002.⁸

Still more focused competition arises from providers operating outside both regional accreditation and federal student financial aid systems. These organizations are often divisions of corporations such as Cisco, Microsoft, and Novell or may operate in alliance with one or more industries, providing learning opportunities directed at passing examinations ranging from real estate to information technology certification. These providers may also have public roots including classes offered by training arms of state and federal governments. The rise of technology, chiefly from access to Internet-based instruction, has provided unprecedented access to learning opportunities both accredited and non-accredited throughout the world. And, since

the Internet knows no national boundaries, it is even more difficult to trace enrollment volume in alternative pathways. Adelman (2000) estimates that more than 1.6 million certifications in information technology were earned worldwide from 1997 to 2000, during the Internet bubble of the last decade. The noncredit arm of higher education also is involved in certification partnerships to some unspecified degree. When those partnerships and cooperative efforts lag, many potential providers will fill the gap.

Either by enrolling in noncredit classes or in classes offered by alternative providers, learners make conscious decisions to seek and enroll in an instructor-led activity. This suggests that they have clear goals in mind, are willing to devote scheduled time to the pursuit of these goals, believe that the provider they choose can provide the learning they seek, and have faith that their experience will be recognized as credible. If noncredit higher education enjoys an advantage in this marketplace, it is the credibility that accrues to the accredited institutions to which they are attached. Given the accelerated appetite for adult learning, the profusion of alternative providers, and the erosion of adult enrollments in credit programs, the prospects for maintaining this advantage throughout coming decades appears tenuous.

Who Takes Noncredit Classes?

Precious little is known about the demographic characteristics of noncredit learners much less their motivation to enroll in noncredit classes. If we categorize learners by the choices they make, certain learners may prefer noncredit programs because they are not interested in pursuing degrees or may simply believe that a shorter learning experience outweighs the pursuit of a degree. We should also leave room for those noncredit learners who have never considered a degree. At the same time, we can only speculate about the motivation of noncredit learners and the reasons they would forego college credit.

The portrait of who consumes noncredit education is even more incomplete than the types of activities for which they enroll. Only an occasional glimpse informs the national picture of noncredit participants. For example, Phillippe and Valiga (2002) report that 28 percent of the noncredit students at community colleges already attained a bachelor's degree or higher. In fact, one in 10 noncredit learners had a master's degree or higher, a proportion significantly larger than was found in credit classes. We don't know from this work, however, what types of learning experiences attracted these learners to noncredit classes and whether a similar pattern exists among baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral/research institutions that provide noncredit programs.

In general, a wider range of ages are found in community college noncredit programs than credit programs. Noncredit learners are more satisfied with the instruction they received. According to Phillippe and Valiga, noncredit students aged 40 or older were more likely than others to take classes for personal enrichment, while younger students were more likely to take classes for career-related reasons.

It is common that students take both credit and noncredit classes together. Some classes are offered simultaneously for credit and noncredit. A recent survey in California indicates that nearly a third of all community college students are enrolled exclusively in either noncredit classes or in both noncredit and credit classes.⁹ Other reports from California indicate that nearly half of all students who earn an associate degree at City College in San Francisco and then go on to a four-year college began their college careers in noncredit classes.¹⁰

Noncredit Remedial Classes

At the lowest reaches of education attainment, a significant number of noncredit students at community colleges were single parents learning workforce specific skills. These learners sought skills in personal computers, and soft skills—such as effective leadership skills—required in workplace settings. Noncredit has also become the preferred vehicle for providing remedial postsecondary education, particularly among community colleges where entire programs have been built around providing structured transitions for low-income adults from remedial education to the traditional college classroom and to employment markets. In fact, Arizona, New York, and Illinois limit all noncredit funding to the remedial and developmental area.¹¹ For different reasons, the other large players in the noncredit remedial arena are public 4-year colleges and universities that have been statutorily barred from receiving state support for remedial instruction.

The HigherEd.Org survey reveals that volume of remedial noncredit activity is highest at community college but that average noncredit activity as a proportion of total noncredit activity was nearly consistent among community colleges and baccalaureate and doctoral institutions community colleges (Table 2).

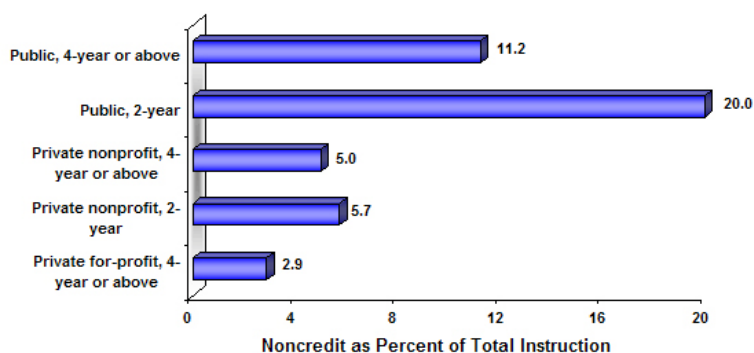
| Classification | % |
|---|----------|
| Associates Colleges | 21.3 |
| Baccalaureate Colleges--General | 21.8 |
| Baccalaureate Colleges--Liberal Arts | 21.2 |
| Baccalaureate/Associates Colleges | 18.3 |
| Doctoral/Research Universities--Extensive | 11.0 |
| Doctoral/Research Universities--Intensive | 19.3 |
| Masters Colleges and Universities I | 12.0 |
| Masters Colleges and Universities II | 15.0 |
| Theological seminaries and other specialized faith-related institutions | 9.1 |

Who Offers Noncredit Programs?

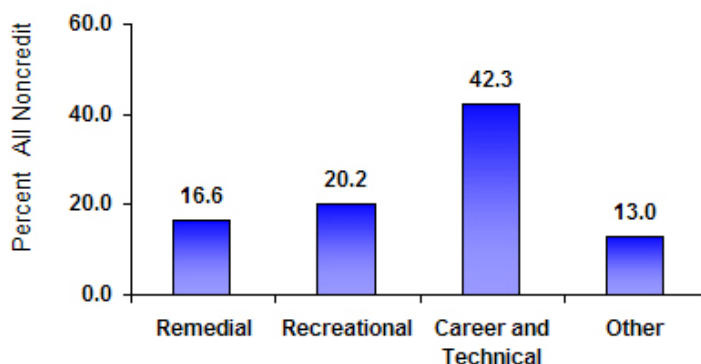
Noncredit classes account for an average of 9.9 percent of total classes across all of American higher education, a significant statistic that bears further exploration. One in four institutions surveyed offer no noncredit classes. At the other extreme, nearly 2 percent of institutions indicated that noncredit classes account for more than half of their total instructional activity. Table 3 displays reported noncredit activity as a percentage of all instructional activity across Carnegie classifications.

| Classification | % |
|---|----------|
| Associates Colleges | 16.0 |
| Baccalaureate Colleges--General | 3.1 |
| Baccalaureate Colleges--Liberal Arts | 3.9 |
| Baccalaureate/Associates Colleges | 9.0 |
| Doctoral/Research Universities--Extensive | 12.5 |
| Doctoral/Research Universities--Intensive | 9.5 |
| Masters Colleges and Universities I | 8.4 |
| Masters Colleges and Universities II | 1.5 |
| Medical schools and medical centers | 14.0 |
| Other separate health profession schools | 6.5 |
| Other specialized institutions | 3.5 |
| Schools of art, music, and design | 15.6 |
| Schools of business and management | 7.2 |
| Schools of engineering and technology | 1.7 |
| Schools of law | 2.6 |
| Theological seminaries and other specialized faith-related institutions | 7.6 |
| Tribal colleges | 11.0 |
| Total | 9.9 |

Noncredit Activity is Highest at Public Institutions



Career and Technical Classes Lead Noncredit Activity



Led by 2-year institutions, the public sector plays a larger role in noncredit classes than does the private sector. For-profit 4-year providers appear to play only a minor role in the noncredit marketplace, perhaps because the boundaries between credit offerings and noncredit offerings are not as fixed in for-profit institutions and because of lack of state subsidies.¹² Private for-profits do not receive state subsidies either, a factor which undoubtedly accounts for their relatively smaller role in noncredit education as a percent of their total instructional offerings.

What is Offered?

The HigherEd.Org survey asked institutions to identify their percentages of remedial (ESL, Adult Basic Education, and developmental), recreational (leisure and avocational), and career and technical noncredit classes. Most noncredit instruction occurs in career and technical areas regardless of institutional level or control. For-profit respondents indicated that they offer neither leisure or remedial noncredit classes.

Remedial, recreational, and career and technical noncredit education are not evenly distributed across all institutions. Table 4 depicts the average proportion of noncredit activity by type across sectors and levels. Not surprisingly, given their mission to serve low-income and minority students, the proportion of the noncredit program that is remedial is highest in public 2-year institutions. At the same time, remedial noncredit classes constitute about 10 percent of the noncredit activity at all but private-for-profit 4 year and above institutions. Noncredit remedial classes offered by non-public institutions presumably do not receive state subsidy but this lack of support, by itself, does not fully explain why private for-profit 2-year institutions offer nearly 5 times the amount of noncredit remedial education than private for-profit 4-year institutions.

The proportion of the noncredit program that is recreational in nature is highest in public 2-year and 4-year institutions. Among the types of noncredit activity surveyed, recreational classes are least likely to be subsidized either by state government or employers. Absent subsidies by institutions themselves, participants in recreational classes typically bear the cost. Recreational noncredit activity in the non-profit sector is less significantly less than what is found in the public sector. It is negligible in the for-profit sector.

Career and technical noncredit activity dominates all noncredit programming with the exception of the private for-profit 2-year sector. It constitutes more than half of all programming in the public sector, perhaps because, unlike the nonprofit sector, it is more likely to receive state subsidy in addition to employer subsidies.

| Sector and Level | Average % Remedial | Average % Recreational | Average % Career and Technical | Average % Other |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Private for-profit, 2-year | 16.9 | 0.6 | 13.3 | 0.0 |
| Private for-profit, 4-year or above | 2.8 | 2.0 | 28.6 | 0.0 |
| Private nonprofit, 2-year | 10.5 | 11.3 | 29.0 | 1.7 |
| Private nonprofit, 4-year or above | 16.2 | 17.6 | 31.9 | 21.2 |
| Public, 2-year | 24.2 | 24.7 | 51.6 | 13.5 |
| Public, 4-year or above | 9.4 | 28.1 | 53.6 | 14.4 |

Who Finances Noncredit Education?

If noncredit programs have been relegated to second-class status, their funding has followed suit. There are disparities among states and at institutional levels that contribute to the Hidden College's current financing jumble.

States. States are very proficient at allocating resources based on seat-time. Two basic mechanisms exist to fund noncredit education at the state level, allocations based on full-time equivalent student formulae and resources made available in the form of dollars earmarked for a specific purposes such as literacy and/or workforce development. A survey undertaken in 2000 by the National Center for Continuing Education and Training (Warford, 2000) reported that seventeen states fund noncredit courses on an full-time equivalent (FTE) basis. Of these 17 states, Maryland, Oregon, and Texas fund noncredit FTE at the same rate as credit FTE. The remaining 14 states fund noncredit hour FTE at a reduced rate, between half and three-quarters of the going rate for credit FTE. No states fund hobby or other recreational classes although handful of states report that general interest courses qualify for state aid. Finally, Arizona, Illinois, and New York limit noncredit FTE reimbursement to remedial programs. Twenty-four states also fund noncredit programming off-formula through targeted grants, usually in the workforce area.

Receiving state reimbursement for noncredit classes may be both a blessing and a curse. While state dollars can provide a predictable source of revenue for the noncredit program, they also can rob institutions of the profit motive needed to create new, entrepreneurial courses. And, when state reimbursement is limited to certain noncredit classes or programs, it can dictate the content as well as the delivery of those experiences.

Institutions. The noncredit arm of institutions almost always must generate revenue to cover operations, salaries, and overhead. When all is said and done, the goal is to make a profit. The HigherEd.Org survey indicated that 82.7 percent of institutions receive no reimbursement for noncredit classes, meaning that their noncredit activity must be self-supporting or otherwise subsidized by institutions themselves from other revenue. Of those institutions that do receive state reimbursement, almost all are community colleges (87.0%).

Business and Industry. It is estimated that American businesses spent more than \$50 billion training employees in 2004.¹³ Mindful of the impact on their bottom line, more and more companies are outsourcing their training, especially small companies that can't afford training division. It's not clear how much of this "new" business might translate into noncredit activity, but forming partnerships with business and industry is certainly not new to noncredit programs. However, the competition for the corporate training dollar is stiff. There also is an increasing demand for online employee training.

Learners. Noncredit programs don't qualify for federal student financial aid and typically are not subsidized by state governments. When their enrollment is not subsidized by their employers, learners themselves pay the full fee associated with their classes. These fees can vary from a minimal charge for supplies and materials to several hundred dollars.

Setting An Agenda

The maxim that "all politics is local" is frequently used to explain why large systems operate in a nonuniform way. The rules that separate noncredit from credit programs are no exception. In the absence of firm guidelines from oversight groups about what learning activities should be assigned to the noncredit arena, institutions have considerable latitude to determine where noncredit activities should be deployed to meet their individual circumstances and where the boundaries between the credit and noncredit program lie.

Is Separate Good?

Business decisions and strategy appear to lend more rationale for separating the credit and noncredit programs than academic necessity. Below, we compare the operational, academic, and tactical advantages and disadvantages in maintaining the status quo, or "Keeping the Hidden College Hidden." There are no "best" alternatives within this matrix, only improvements that might be brought about in a particular institution. Higher education institutions are complex organizations with distinct cultures in which rapid change is often resisted. Institutional leaders who may contemplate removing barriers between the credit and noncredit programs would do

well to think through the effect of these advantages and disadvantages as they position their institutions to deal with a flattening of adult enrollments.

In general--and amid many advantages--we find no tactical disadvantages to pursuing an aggressive noncredit program. Along the operational and academic continuum, there are trade-offs that need to be balanced, however. Many longstanding academic barriers can be addressed through the use of competencies as basic learning units for both the credit and noncredit side of the house. This fundamental work is hard work and not well understood by all parties. It requires administrative and faculty commitment to gathering information about student learning and using that information to examine an institution's total curricula, credit and noncredit. It also involves looking at competencies--as opposed to credit hours--as the common denominator for all learning experiences and the courage to step outside of the traditional higher education delivery paradigm. Few institutions can engage in this work without substantial assistance and expertise. We believe that the significant result of this work would be the recognition that there are many more congruencies between a given institution's credit and noncredit offerings than dissimilarities.

| Keeping the Hidden College Hidden | |
|---|--|
| Status Quo Advantages | Status Quo Disadvantages |
| Operational | |
| Noncredit courses have freedom from internal and external guidelines that govern the creation of new courses and programs. | Isolation of noncredit programs from institution's internal stakeholders and from internal quality control. |
| Ability to quickly recruit and approve faculty for new needs, especially faculty that are expert in their fields. | Faculty recruited quickly often are not subject to review by the credit side of the institution, resulting in continued isolation of the noncredit program. |
| Accounting practices and standards remain separate. The credit program is chiefly based on fund accounting whereas noncredit is based on cash accounting. | Separate bookkeeping and accounting practices erect barriers that complicate efforts to educate stakeholders how noncredit programs might support credit programs. |
| Academic | |
| Organizationally consistent with past practices in most institutions. No threat to existing institutional culture. | Keeps credit programs isolated from immediate realities while keeping noncredit programs on unequal footing. |
| Ability to test knowledge gained from new noncredit activities to before their migration to the credit program. | If noncredit programs are viewed as sole institutional test beds, may inhibit credit programs from similar risk-taking. |
| Predictability. Without change, credit hours remain the "coin of the realm" around which all finances and learning delivery decisions are built. | The use of competencies as learning units remain episodic, chiefly when sought by external stakeholders, and doesn't penetrate all academic areas. |
| Tactical | |
| Positions the institution to quickly identify learning needs in the external environment and to respond to those needs expediently. | Doesn't automatically involve the credit program in meeting external needs. Obligates only one part of the institution to respond. |
| Provides one recognizable entity for contact with local businesses and other entities. | Makes such contact the responsibility of one arm of the institution, not the whole institution. Segregates initiatives. |

External Barriers

Even if institutions decided to address all the issues that separate noncredit programs from their credit counterparts, several systemic barriers must be surmounted. First and foremost are the regulations that govern delivery of federal student financial aid. Title IV regulations require that eligible students be enrolled in classes that are part of a course of study leading to a degree or other formal award. When courses do not lead down the pathway to a degree, they cannot be counted toward students' financial need. The federal government is perhaps more wedded to the credit hour as an institutional accountability device. Rules such as seat-time and making eligible for federal assistance only those credits that apply to a degree serve as disincentives to connect noncredit and credit programs.

Barriers can also be content specific. State governments sometimes fund noncredit programs to produce *specific* classes that are reimbursed according to certain programmatic rules. These arrangements lead certain components of the institution, typically customized workforce development programs, to acquire a separate identity within the noncredit enterprise. The result can move all noncredit units further from the credit program.

Moving Toward Quality

Quality, for reasons mentioned above has long been linked with seat-time. However, just as there is some momentum toward evaluating quality based on what students learn, not the time they spend in class, there is emerging interest in applying those standards to noncredit programs. Regional accrediting bodies are, in part, responsible for a shift toward competencies and learning outcomes. The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association now requires that "...assessment of student learning extends to *all* educational offerings, including credit and noncredit certificate programs" and "...accreditation looks at the total organization...the evaluation includes substantial subsidiary enterprises, noncredit training programs or other significant continuing education endeavors...".¹⁴ The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has become known for expectations that its accredited institutions engage in rigorous evaluation of student learning. Although SACS does not explicitly require institutions to examine noncredit programs in the same way that credit programs are evaluated, it is implied. SACS does require that noncredit courses applied to credit be subject to "documentation that the noncredit course work is equivalent to a designated credit experience."¹⁵

As long as the credit hour is defined as a unit of quality, and as long as state allocation formulas rely on credit hours, noncredit programs also will require a time dimension to certify quality. The International Association for Continuing Education and Training requires that organizations awarding its CEU's be "chartered, incorporated, or a recognized proprietorship or governmental unit with a well defined organizational structure." Most higher education institutions would have little trouble meeting these quality assurance stipulations. Additionally, and in line with emerging accreditation standards, IACET requires CEU providers to publish clear and concise written statements of intended learning outcomes based on identified needs for each continuing education and training learning event and to have a methodology to measure each event's learning outcomes.

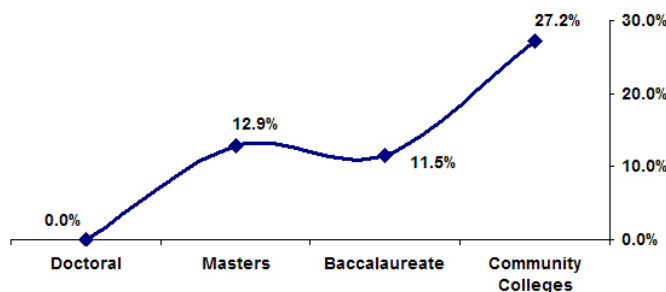
Institutions, themselves, may choose to create even more rigorous guidelines for their noncredit programs than those required by either regional or national accreditors. The qualifications of faculty is an area that has seen increased scrutiny in recent years. SACS requires institutions to ensure that faculty teaching general education courses at the undergraduate level possess a doctor's or master's degree in the teaching discipline or a master's degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline). Those faculty teaching courses not designed for baccalaureate transfer require a bachelor's degree in the teaching discipline, or associate's degree and demonstrated competencies in the teaching discipline. Other regional accreditors have similar requirements. The extent to which noncredit faculty meet these criteria is unknown. Institutions that wish to make more permeable the boundaries between credit and noncredit programs will want to apply the same standards for faculty certification to both programs.

Because they are different, noncredit programs should not be subject to the same accountability measures that are common to the credit program. For obvious reasons efforts to determine graduation rates do not apply. Given their short-term and non-standard duration, it makes correspondingly little sense to attempt to measure retention rates either. It does make some sense, however, to measure the transition rate of noncredit students in selected programs to credit programs and to judiciously calculate employment-related outcomes such as salary increases and job advancement.

Growth in Remedial Noncredit Programs

Community colleges are more likely candidates to receive state funding for noncredit remedial activity than baccalaureate institutions which have been prohibited from offering reimbursable remedial education in many states. The response has been to move remedial classes to the noncredit side of the house. Community colleges, on the other hand, typically are permitted to report remedial courses for "institutional credit" in the same way that other, credit courses are reported for state reimbursement. Master's institutions also have a significant ratio of remedial to all noncredit courses. From the 2000-2001 to the 2002-2003 academic year, noncredit remedial programming increased by 27 percent at community colleges while no corresponding growth was observed at doctoral institutions.

**Increases in Remedial Noncredit
Classes 2000-01 to 2003-04**



A Better Picture of Noncredit Activity

Many will note that American higher education appears to have done very well over its history without reporting on all of its activities. Certainly, the requirement established in 1992 that institutions that wish to participate in federal student financial aid programs must report data to IPEDS was greeted grudgingly by some in higher education. In fact, this obligation is still seen as more of a burden than a benefit by many institutions. We assume that any new, national data reporting activity by institutions would be similarly regarded by those providing noncredit data. However, to gain the national picture of noncredit activity that is needed to drive policy and decision-making, additional reporting burdens will be needed. Would having a more complete picture of noncredit activity be worth it?

What is gained? Good policy requires good data. Institutions of higher education provide significant learning pathways that are largely unknown outside the institution and those to whom it markets its noncredit programs. Collectively, the investment by individuals and institutions in noncredit programs is large, but unknown. Following is what we believe to be the advantages for all parties in gaining the whole picture of higher education's contribution to learning. We believe that better data about the Hidden College will:

- Fill out dimensions of postsecondary learning in the United States that are now hidden, including what types of students are pursuing what types of learning experiences
- Provide an expanded route to address issues of access to higher education, including forming a picture of how low-literate and non-English proficient learners enter the higher education pipeline.
- Allow effective integration of state and federal workforce policies by knowing the types of training and education that higher education provides. While higher education's contribution to workforce development is sometimes misunderstood, a fuller picture that demonstrates higher participation numbers than previously thought will be hard to overlook.
- Serve as a basis for higher education to advocate for greater public support. While the public is likely to be unsympathetic to funding classes that are recreational in nature, classes that are directly work-related can lay claim to some form of support.

What might be lost? Are there compelling reasons to keep the Hidden College perpetually hidden? Some may insist that if state legislators knew how much enrollment was not officially reported to state agencies and how much revenue was generated, the result would be a corresponding reduction in state support. Such thinking is indeed in the realm of the possible but, at the same time, is short-sighted at both the institutional and legislative levels. Institutions naturally wish to protect their assets and exposing them to scrutiny without an understanding of the vital role that noncredit education plays in developing a better educated citizenry and/or

workforce is not recommended without a better understanding of its return to the state and taxpayers.

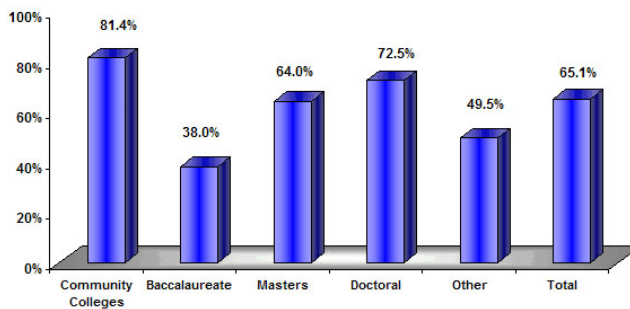
On the other hand, a careful analyses of the total impact of the credit and noncredit program would seemingly be welcome news to policymakers. As higher education struggles for resources, state budget makers may want more information on all forms of institutional revenue and it is to an institution's advantage to proactively take stock of its assets now rather than wait for future intervention.

Institutional Barriers to Better Information.

Collecting data on noncredit activities is not automatic work at many institutions. Surprisingly, the HigherEd.Org survey indicates that fully one-third do not. One reason is the culture of noncredit programming in which students either are not required or are reluctant to provide complete application forms or to otherwise provide personally identifiable information for a course that is not credit. These institutions would appear to operate at a strategic disadvantage.

When institutions collect noncredit data, they often may exist in separate software systems. While this is certainly preferable to collecting no data, it requires additional work on behalf of personnel to combine these data so that all instructional activity can be viewed holistically. One-third of collecting institutions report that they collect noncredit activity at the course level, not at the student unit record level. These institutions lose the ability to determine the characteristics of those who took given classes as well as the ability to determine subsequent enrollment in the credit program.

Not All Institutions Collect Noncredit Data



Source: Milam 2004

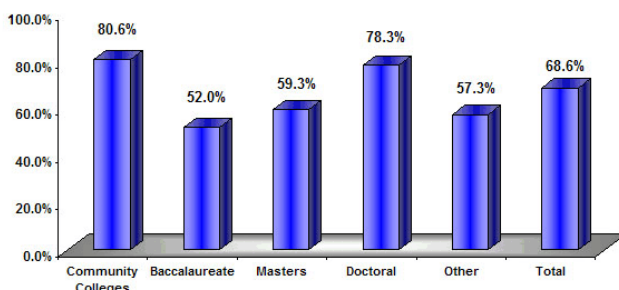
Unless state government requires reporting of noncredit activity it is either not systematically gathered or gathered only sporadically. Computer systems that integrate credit and noncredit data would help institutions understand the full sweep of their instructional efforts. As long as computer systems that track enrollments remain separate, the prospects for the routine reporting of noncredit activity are hindered.

Lack of internal available data about noncredit programs also frustrates institutional management. All institutions have a vested interest in assessing faculty productivity. Without the ability to determine which faculty are teaching both in the credit and noncredit programs, estimates of productivity are likely to be inaccurate. Similarly, the calculation of instructional expenditures by faculty FTE is impacted by inadequate information on noncredit programming. When institutions include the cost of providing noncredit instruction in overall instructional budgets, an inability to include corresponding noncredit enrollments overestimates the cost of producing credit enrollments.

Colleges respond most quickly to mandates for information. Only about half of all states collect data on noncredit enrollments. Of the state agencies involved, only a handful collect data at the student unit record level: Florida, Massachusetts, New York, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Utah. Only two states collect noncredit data from private institutions, California and the District of Columbia.

In general the states appear to follow the federal lead. They collect a great deal of information on credit students, but only 6 states collect the same level of detail on noncredit students. Nearly half of all states generate no external pressure for institutions to report noncredit data. The reasons that state agencies don't require institutions to report noncredit data are not clear but may include tacit agreements not to expose noncredit enrollments to wide scrutiny or perhaps a general lack of interest in noncredit courses by these agencies. Most of the emerging accountability programs fostered by state agencies is directed at credit programs that are supported by the state. In this new paradigm, institutional energy is spent on collecting and analyzing credit data while little time or commitment is left for a similar assessment of Hidden College outcomes.

One-Third of Institutions Lack Unit Record Data on Noncredit Enrollment



Source: Milam, 2004

The increased vigilance now in place with the Homeland Security Act also has institutional implications for the noncredit program. Increased surveillance of course enrollments is limited to the credit program. However, other interpretations of state and federal law require institutions to report both credit and noncredit enrollment for nonresident aliens. This requires institutions to accelerate noncredit bookkeeping requirements and may result in more sophisticated unit record databases for noncredit programs where they do not now exist.

A Role for State Government

The interest in preparing a better educated workforce should preoccupy state policy makers. Key to understanding where a given state's efforts are working, is a better understanding of the breadth of noncredit programming. Coherence among all programs is a goal. Policy decisions that might be made with better data include whether higher education should be expected to produce more certification opportunities for its citizens or whether that role should be left for private providers. Alternatively, state tax incentives could be applied to businesses that provide noncredit learning opportunities for their employees.

Other vital public interests could be monitored by access to noncredit information as well, including a more accurate estimation of the extent of remedial and English as a Second Language instruction across the entire state. Many states have deemed their community college sector as the sole provider of state-funded remedial education. The result has been that 4-year colleges and universities now provide remedial classes only on the noncredit side. There is no accurate way to gauge the volume of this activity and whether it results in more successful transitions to higher education, for example, than those who begin their remedial education at a community college.

Noncredit information would inform state decision makers about the appetite for learning within the state and the menu for learning that citizens are pursuing. A method for calibrating which learning experiences align with state policy goals appears to be a missing ingredient in state policy. These gaps in knowledge mean inevitably missed opportunities to proactively and rationally plan to meet emerging trends in a global economy.

A Role for the Federal Government

The federal government bases its oversight of the American system of higher education on the credit hour. The IPEDS system is a way for the federal government to tabulate credit hour enrollments and to report them as an estimate of activity in higher education. We have seen that this constitutes a significant undercount of total activity. Even so, accountability systems including the federal Graduation Rate Survey and the National Collegiate Athletic Association's graduation survey are based on the credit program only.

The federal financial aid system is deeply invested in credit hour production education. Some small, pilot studies have occurred in the distance education area to determine the

feasibility of relaxing the time-linked basis for determining financial aid eligibility, but in the main the federal government is as dependent on the credit hour as are state governments. This stance ensures that both levels of government miss a significant part of the learning market served in noncredit programs. In a similar vein, the federal Carl Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act reimburses institutions for their work in providing career and technical education, but only for students enrolled in credit-based degree programs.

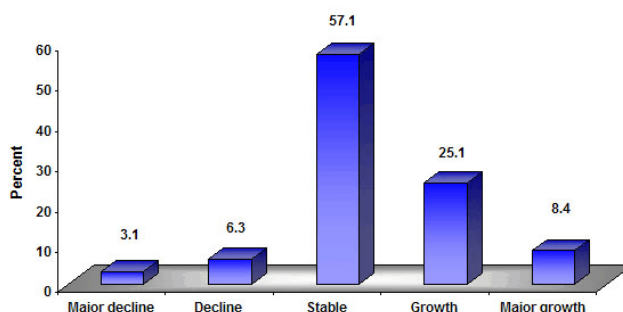
The federal government also disallows noncredit enrollment as a basis for the Hope and Lifetime Learning Credit. The wisdom of this policy choice is perhaps based on the perception that noncredit classes are recreational in nature. Should it be demonstrated that participation in noncredit classes, especially those in the workforce development, business training, and career and technical areas, lead directly to economic returns for the student and, by extension, to state and federal coffers by way of increased taxable income, grounds would exist for revisiting this rule. In the absence of firm data, however, it is difficult to pose such dialog.

Changes in federal data collection methodology would provide a fuller picture of learning activity in the United States. It can be anticipated that initiation of such an effort would require extensive cooperation by institutions in reporting this information. The HigherEd.Org survey indicates that a significant number of institutions would have difficulty in aggregating data to respond quickly to new federal requests.

Technology and Noncredit Education

More than any other change in higher education over the past decade, technology has served to blur the distinctions between credit and noncredit learning. Most of this change has been brought about by freeing instruction from bounded time and place restrictions that accompany traditional, in-class learning. This sea change has surfaced fundamental questions about whether the credit hour, itself, is a consistent measure of learning across disciplines and raised more clearly the need to assess learning that results from multiple sources. It is this democratization of learning opportunities that bodes well for the future of noncredit programming.

The Use of Technology is Increasing in Noncredit Courses



The HigherEd.Org survey indicates that noncredit providers are increasingly turning to technology to deliver courses. One third of institutions reported growth of the use of technology to deliver non-credit course material. Nearly a third of respondents indicated that the number of noncredit courses that employ both technology and traditional instruction, known as hybrid courses, had increased in the short-term. Another third of respondents noted a growth in classes that were solely technology-based.

Putting It All Together

The Hidden College is an enigma. At once it appears to be a much used vehicle for institutions and learners to access educational opportunity that is not otherwise available. Institutions use it to add value to their collection of education offerings. Learners use it to access education in formats that are not perhaps as time-linked as is common in the credit program. The information presented in this report notwithstanding, no one knows the full breadth of this activity across the nation.

The critical nature of learning in the knowledge economy and the possibility of creating better planning for deployment of higher education opportunities argue loudly for harvesting better information about the Hidden College. We also note that none of the major higher education associations whose purview extends to noncredit education have raised this as an issue. Neither the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education nor the University Continuing Education Association have developed positions that indicate that more information about the noncredit enterprise would be of value. Similarly, with the exception of the American Association of Community Colleges, none of the associations that represent sectors and levels of higher education that were interviewed in the HigherEd.Org study have yet seen this as imperative.

Many more reasons appear to support the concept of better data about the Hidden College than surface to maintain the status quo. The fast march that higher education has witnessed into a world of increased competition from for-profit providers and whether that rises to the level of debate in public policy cannot be addressed from where we now find ourselves. We do not argue that it is not proper to allow competition; instead, we argue that we simply don't understand enough about higher education to wade into those waters. Institutions, themselves are not automatically resistant to the need to create better national data. One respondent to the HigherEd.Org survey indicated that ". . . a single national database that can be mined by organizations such as Lumina would help us all."

Our second thesis is that institutions themselves need to do more to address the bifurcation of their credit and noncredit programs. We are aware that institutional culture and tradition often dictate form. However, we recommend that institutions look seriously at students enrolled in noncredit programs and how they might access the credit program. Too often, it is assumed that students in noncredit programs consciously choose to forego credit and the

possibility that the learning they acquire on the noncredit side would ever be applied to a degree. Again, we simply don't know enough about the nature of these programs and how students flow in and out of them to vouchsafe this assumption. It may well be that in some institutions this issue is transparent and that students enrolled in noncredit programs may not know that their class is noncredit because institutions transcript their learning experience as credit. However, since this area has not been clearly studied, it remains one of the unresolved issues confronting the Hidden College. Meanwhile, institutions would do well to delineate for their students where the transition points between the credit and noncredit programs lie. It is to all party's advantage to connect the Hidden College to the "regular" college to promote seamless movement for learners.

Noncredit education is more important to learners at this juncture in the history of higher education than at anytime previously. Just at the cusp of recovery from devastating years state budget shortfalls, public higher education remains relentlessly under the watch of state governments and Congress. This scrutiny, combined with concerns by a restless public about the credibility of higher education, should serve as impetus for institutions and policymakers to look at the entire enterprise. The ability to weigh the contributions of noncredit higher education in the total learning equation has been heretofore lacking. With this report we are able to fill in only some of the gaps in our knowledge. We hope that these first-generation results will lead to more questions about the role of noncredit education in a knowledge economy. We also hope that this report points to what institutions should consider as next steps in planning the future of noncredit education as well as the intersections where state and federal policy may play a role in facilitating the expansion of learning in a learning society.

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Appendix A

Technical Notes for the HigherEd.Org National Survey of Noncredit Education

The HigherEd.Org research consisted of surveys of state higher education agencies and a national sample of institutions. HigherEd.Org staff also conducted telephone and in-person interviews with federal, state, association, institutional contacts, and key informants.

State Surveys

An online and paper survey was mailed to 86 state organizations using mailing and email contact lists from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and the State Higher Education Executive Officers. These represent all states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The survey was pilot tested by 15 state organizations at the SHEEO/NCES conference in May, 2003 and additional feedback was gathered from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), the State University of New York system office (SUNY), and the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS).

State surveys were mailed in the second week of August, 2003. Follow-up emails were sent in September and October, 2003. Many states responded using the online survey form and this version was also used for data entry. Additional follow-up phone calls were made to increase the response rate. Participants were encouraged to complete the survey online, but could complete and mail back the paper version if they chose.

Institutional Surveys

An online survey of active, Title IV, two and four-year, degree-granting institutions was conducted beginning in February, 2004. Using the new Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Dataset Cutting Tool, a dataset was cut for the project team to use. The sample was carefully analyzed so that it matched the IPEDS universe. Pilot testing of the online institutional survey was done with a small subset of institutions in November, 2003 at the Virginia Association for Management Analysis and Planning (VAMAP) conference in Williamsburg, VA. The institutional survey was administered from mid-February through May, 2004.

A special restricted license was obtained from NCES in order to send the institutional survey to IPEDS institutional Keyholders. This was applied for in December, 2003 and received in February, 2004 and required the implementation of an NCES-approved security plan. Analysis of the IPEDS Keyholder contact list for the sample of institutions found some contacts with many institutions listed under their responsibility. These contacts were telephoned to ask whether they wanted to complete the survey separately for each of their institutions, or as a

whole. For example, the University of Phoenix has many campuses, but was expected to have the same policy toward non-credit across all of them. The Pennsylvania State University system, on the other hand, has a single contact person for all campuses. Penn State was predicted to vary somewhat by location, depending upon campus differences in mission, course offerings, and administrative information systems.

Follow-up emails were sent to maintain an adequate response rate. A complex system for tracking the various states of responses was developed as part of a “behind-the-scenes” web application. This included the opportunity for institutional contacts to change their contact information and reroute the survey via email to another person. The online institution survey was designed based on lessons and data gleaned from the state survey.

Response Rates

| | Respondents | % | Sampl e | % | Populatio n | % |
|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|------------------------|---------------|
| <i>Public</i> | | | | | | |
| Associates | 296 | 23.5 | 496 | 23.8 | 994 | 23.4 |
| Baccalaureate | 27 | 2.1 | 43 | 2.1 | 82 | 1.9 |
| Masters | 83 | 6.6 | 143 | 6.9 | 270 | 6.4 |
| Doctoral | 58 | 4.6 | 92 | 4.4 | 165 | 3.9 |
| Missing/other | 42 | 3.3 | 89 | 4.3 | 268 | 6.3 |
| Subtotal | 506 | 40.1 | 863 | 41.4 | 1,779 | 41.9 |
| <i>Private, for profit</i> | | | | | | |
| Associates | 107 | 8.5 | 209 | 10.0 | 404 | 9.5 |
| Baccalaureate | 5 | 0.4 | 6 | 0.3 | 12 | 0.3 |
| Masters | 3 | 0.2 | 5 | 0.2 | 8 | 0.2 |
| Doctoral | 0 | 0. | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 0.0 |
| Missing/other | 117 | 9.3 | 157 | 7.5 | 367 | 8.7 |
| Subtotal | 232 | 18.3 | 377 | 18.1 | 793 | 18.7 |
| <i>Private, nonprofit</i> | | | | | | |
| Associates | 45 | 3.6 | 75 | 3.6 | 134 | 3.2 |
| Baccalaureate | 186 | 14.7 | 239 | 11.5 | 477 | 11.2 |
| Masters | 90 | 7.1 | 160 | 7.7 | 318 | 7.5 |
| Doctoral | 26 | 2.1 | 48 | 2.3 | 90 | 2.1 |
| Missing/other | 177 | 14.0 | 324 | 15.5 | 651 | 15.3 |
| Subtotal | 524 | 41.5 | 846 | 40.6 | 1,670 | 39.4 |
| Total | 1,262 | 100.0 | 2,086 | 100.0 | 4,242 | 100.0% |

For the state survey, the overall response rate is 94.2% (81 of 86). Item response rates within the respondent group are as high as 100% for some questions. Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia are represented. Agencies in Maryland, Ohio, and Texas were non-respondents. Of the 81 respondents, the majority (47 or 58.0%) are responsible for both two- and four-year institutions; while 17 (21.0%) oversee only two-year schools and another 17 (21.0%) oversee only four-year schools.

For the institution survey, there was is currently a 60.4 percent response rate (1,262 of 2,086). Information about Carnegie classification, control, and level was obtained from the IPEDS data for 2002. The Carnegie classifications are combined for similar types of schools. For example Master's I and Master's II institutions are combined into Master's. Schools without a current Carnegie classification are combined with specialized schools into a category called Missing/Other. The breakout by collapsed Carnegie classification, level, and control is described in Tables A-1 and A-2, which compare the response rate to the sample and to the total IPEDS population for Fall, 2002. Overall, these response rates suggest that the respondents are roughly comparable to the sample and to the population.

The sample of institutions was developed by the University of Virginia team working on allied projects also a part of this Lumina grant on non-traditional learners in postsecondary education. Some institutions in the IPEDS population for 2002 were closed or inactive in 2003. The sample of 2,086 schools was created by selecting every other institution in each category of interest. These sampling categories included collapsed Carnegie classification, control, and state, among other variables.

Table A-2.
Response rates by Level within Control

| | Respondents | % | Sample | % | Population | % |
|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <i>Public</i> | | | | | | |
| Four or more years | 192 | 15.2 | 329 | 15.8 | 669 | 15.8 |
| Two years, less than four | 314 | 24.9 | 534 | 25.6 | 1,110 | 26.2 |
| Subtotal | 506 | 40.1 | 863 | 41.4 | 1,779 | 41.9 |
| | | | | | | |
| <i>Private, for profit</i> | | | | | | |
| Four or more years | 121 | 9.6 | 145 | 7.0 | 299 | 7.0 |
| Two years, less than four | 111 | 8.8 | 232 | 11.1 | 494 | 11.6 |
| Subtotal | 232 | 18.4 | 377 | 18.1 | 793 | 18.7 |
| | | | | | | |
| <i>Private, non-profit</i> | | | | | | |
| Four or more years | 482 | 38.2 | 775 | 37.2 | 1,543 | 36.4 |
| Two years, less than four | 42 | 3.3 | 71 | 3.4 | 127 | 3.0 |
| Subtotal | 524 | 41.5 | 846 | 40.6 | 1,670 | 39.4 |
| | | | | | | |
| Total | 1,262 | 100.0 | 2,086 | 100.0 | 4,242 | 100.0 |

Footnotes

1. American Association of Community Colleges. Accessed on February 7, 2005 at http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/AboutCommunityColleges/Fast_Facts1/Fast_Facts.htm
2. See for example, Grubb, et al (2002). Community Colleges and the Equity Agenda: The Potential of Non-Credit Education.
3. See for example, Wellman, J. & Erlich, T. (2003) "Re-Examining the Sacrosanct Credit Hour" for an excellent discussion about the credit hour, its usefulness, and need for reform.
4. International Association for Continuing Education and Training. Website accessed February 5 2005 at <http://www.iacet.org>
- 5.h ACE's guides are the National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs and the Guide to Educational Credit by Examination.
6. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2003, Table 13), credit enrollments in higher education increased by more than one million students from 1993 to 2000. During the same time the number of "nontraditional students" (aged 25 and older) decreased by 120,000. The proportion of nontraditional student credit enrollment was 43 percent in 1990, 39 percent in 2000, and is predicted to be 38 percent by 2013. Higher education's decrease is set amid the steady increase in adult participation in learning documented by Kim, et al. from 32 percent in 1991 to 40 percent in 1995 to 45 percent in 1999.
7. Kim et. al (2004). Note: There are no requirements for traditional higher education to report noncredit enrollments as part of the federal government's national data collection efforts. Similarly, there are no penalties for inaccuracy.
8. Knapp, L.G., Kelly-Reid, J. E., Whitmore, R.W., Wu, S., Huh, S., Levine, B., Berzofsky, M., and Broyles, S.G. (2005).
9. Chancellor's Office, California Community Colleges, 2003.
10. San Francisco Chronicle, Editorial, "Crisis in Higher Education: Shortchanging noncredit students, Sunday, April 11, 2004
11. Warford., L. J. (2002).
12. The HigherEd.Org survey drew only one response from private nonprofit, less-than 2-year institutions. Accordingly, they are excluded from the comparative analyses reported here.
13. Training Magazine (2004). 2004 Industry Report. Retrieved May 25, 2005 from http://www.trainingmag.com/training/reports_analysis/index.jsp

14. The Higher Learning Commission (2003). Handbook of Accreditation. Chicago: Author.
15. The Southern Association of Colleges, Council on Colleges (2001, December). Principles of Accreditation: Foundation for Quality Enhancement. Decatur, GA: Author.