Who Are College Learners with Non-Degree Credentials?

workcred
a division of ANSI

Acknowledgement

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About Us

Workcred

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As a division of the American National Standards Institute, the Workcred team is dedicated to increasing the quality, market value, and effectiveness of credentials and improving relationships within the U.S. credentialing system.

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Executive Summary

Overview

As learners and employers seek flexible pathways to education and career advancement, non-degree credentials such as certifications, certificates, and licenses have gained growing prominence across post-secondary education and the workforce. Yet, relatively little is known about the learners who hold these credentials while enrolled at a postsecondary institution. Using nationally representative data from 53,926 college learners who participated in the Strada Education Foundation 2025 State Opportunity Index survey on learners currently enrolled in postsecondary institutions,[1] the Workcred Division of the American National Standards Institute examined similarities and differences between college learners with and without non-degree credentials at two- and four-year institutions.

Guided by the 4Ps Enrollment Management Framework, which organizes learner experiences into profile, process, progress, and promise,[2] the report provides a descriptive analysis of who holds non-degree credentials, how they experience college, how they perceive their educational progress, and how they view their future opportunities. Together, these dimensions provide insight into characteristics, educational experiences, and future outlooks of college learners with non-degree credentials.

Findings

Profile: Who Holds Non-Degree Credentials?

Non-degree credential holders represented a relatively small but notable segment of learners in the survey, accounting for approximately 13 percent at two-year institutions and 11 percent at four-year institutions. At two-year institutions, learners with non-degree credentials reported a higher percentage as being older, parents, Pell Grant recipients, and part-time. Learners at four-year institutions, with and without non-degree credentials, appeared similar across many demographic characteristics, though those with non-degree credentials were slightly more often older and parents. Overall, college learners with non-degree credentials may not be fundamentally different than college learners without non-degree credentials, though there were key differences that emerged.

Progress and Process: How Do They View Their Educational Journey?

College learners with non-degree credentials across institution types expressed high confidence in their educational experiences, that their education would help them achieve their career goals, and that it would

1 Strada Education Foundation, State Opportunity Index: Connecting Education with Opportunity (Strada Education Foundation, 2025), **https://www.strada.org/state-opportunity-index**.

2 D. H. Kalsbeek, "Framing Retention for Institutional Improvement: A 4 Ps Framework," New Directions for Higher Education, no. 161 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), **https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20041**.

prepare them for future success. At two-year institutions, learners with non-degree credentials reported participating in work-based learning and experiential opportunities slightly more often than learners without non-degree credentials and engaged more often in personalized coaching with employers and co-workers. Based on these findings, college learners with non-degree credentials may be slightly more involved in interactions that could drive quicker job market entry and success.

Promise: What Do They Expect for the Future?

College learners at both institution typeswith non-degree credentials also reported strong post-college expectations. They expressed confidence in their ability to find a job aligned with their interests and aspirations, and more often indicated they had already accepted employment before graduation, though the quality of these jobs was unclear. These findings highlight the potentially important role of non-degree credentials in educational pathways towards supporting learners' career readiness and confidence in the labor market.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The study uncovered the need for institutions, policymakers, and workforce stakeholders to better understand and support learners who hold or pursue non-degree credentials while enrolled at two-year and four-year institutions. To strengthen learning and employment pathways that include non-degree credentials, institutions should consider:

- Improving systems for identifying non-degree credentials and tracking learner outcomes
- Strengthening personalized coaching tailored to non-degree credential attainment and career pathways
- Expanding opportunities for non-degree credential integration and credential stacking
- Enhancing transfer and credit-for-prior-learning opportunities to better recognize and support learners with non-degree credentials

Developing clearer definitions and classifications for non-degree credentials

As employers, policymakers, and educational institutions place increasing emphasis on skills, competencies, and workforce readiness, understanding the experiences of learners who combine non-degree credentials with degree attainment is increasingly important. Further exploration of college learners with non-degree credentials can help institutions create more seamless programs and pathways that connect education to workforce success while supporting learners' long-term educational and career goals.

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Introduction

Non-degree credentials, such as certifications, certificates, and licenses, have drawn increased attention in postsecondary education and workforce discussions. Often designed to validate specific knowledge, skills, or abilities, these credentials are promoted as flexible pathways for workforce preparation, career advancement, and lifelong learning.[1] As employers place greater emphasis on demonstrable skills, and learners seek educational options that provide more flexible and timely economic value, non-degree credentials are increasingly in demand.

This growing interest in non-degree credentials has also raised questions about how they intersect with degree programs.[2,3] While much of the discussion focuses on the labor market value of non-degree credentials, limited data are available regarding the learners who earn them, even though many people are enrolled in postsecondary institutions with non-degree credentials. Highlighting the scope of this learner population, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 17 percent of adults ages 25 to 64 earned both a postsecondary degree and a non-degree credential in 2016, demonstrating that combined degree and non-degree credential attainment is not uncommon among working-age adults.[4] As a result, learners with non-degree credentials who are enrolled in degree programs are an important population to study to better understand how degree and non-degree programs—and the knowledge, skills, or abilities they represent—overlap.

Accordingly, as postsecondary institutions seek to improve enrollment, persistence, completion, and workforce outcomes, they need to better understand the characteristics and experiences of learners who bring non-degree credentials with them or earn them during their degree studies. Examining these learners may provide insights into how non-degree credentials fit within postsecondary pathways, how learners navigate postsecondary education, and how institutions can support learners pursuing both degrees and non-degree credentials.

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1 Workcred, "How Do Credentials Differ?," infographic, 2026, **https://share.ansi.org/wc/Shared%20Documents/Graphics/How-Do-Credentials-Differ-Chart.pdf.**

2 Kyle Albert et al., *What We Know About Non-Degree Credentials: A Literature Scan* (Washington, DC: Non-Degree Credentials Research Network, George Washington Institute of Public Policy, 2019), **https://gwipp.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs6111/files/downloads/06.23.19%20NCRN%20Literature%20Scan.pdf.**

3 Lindsay Daugherty, "Stacking Certificates and Degrees," RAND Corporation, August 4, 2023, originally published in *Inside Higher Ed*, August 3, 2023, **https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/08/stacking-certificates-and-degrees.html**.

4 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Table A43. Percentage of Adults Ages 25 to 64 with Different Combinations of Nondegree and Degree Credentials: 2016," Career and Technical Education Statistics, 2016, **https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/tables/A43.asp**.

About This Report

Using nationally representative data from the Strada Education Foundation 2025 State Opportunity Index survey on currently enrolled college learners,[5] this report provides a descriptive analysis of college learners with non-degree credentials compared with those without non-degree credentials at both two-year and four-year institutions. The use of the term "college learner" refers to students enrolled in college regardless of the type of institution or specific program. And for participants at two-year institutions, some may or may not have been pursuing a degree program during their enrollment.

This report begins with an overview of the growing role of non-degree credentials and credential stacking in postsecondary institutions. It then defines the data, methods, and analytical framework used in the study, followed by a description of the findings. The report concludes with considerations and recommendations for postsecondary institutions, as well as input for future research to support identifying, enrolling, and increasing the success of college learners who hold or intend to pursue non-degree credentials.



5 Strada Education Foundation, *State Opportunity Index: Connecting Education with Opportunity* (Strada Education Foundation, 2025), **https://www.strada.org/state-opportunity-index**.

Background for the Study

Demand for demonstrable skills, rapid technological change, and an increasing emphasis on workforce readiness have increased interest in non-degree credentials.[6] In response, educational institutions, employers, industry associations, and workforce organizations have expanded access to programs for earning non-degree credentials.[7] As a result, learners now have more opportunities than ever to combine postsecondary degree programs with non-degree credentials.

Amid this increased attention on non-degree credentials, one concept that has received particular attention is credential stacking. Credential stacking generally refers to accumulating multiple credentials over time, often in ways that build on one another to support educational progression and career advancement.[8] Stacking may involve earning several non-degree credentials to demonstrate competence in a particular occupation or industry, combining non-degree credentials with postsecondary degrees for a particular program of study, or accumulating different types of credentials to reskill in a different occupation or industry.

While interest in non-degree credentials continues to grow, questions remain about their value and outcomes, particularly among learners from low-income backgrounds.[9] Although some non-degree credentials prepare learners to meet industry requirements, demonstrate occupational competencies, or fulfill professional license application requirements, the purpose and value of others may be less clear. Research has demonstrated that labor market outcomes can vary considerably by credential type, field, and industry recognition.[10] Although advocates point to the potential benefits of non-degree credentials for workforce preparation and economic mobility, questions remain about how to define those benefits, which credentials are most beneficial, how learners use them, and how they interact with degree attainment over time.

Additionally, limited research on college learners with non-degree credentials creates further challenges for postsecondary institutions. As non-degree credential attainment continues to increase, postsecondary institutions may increasingly enroll learners who already hold non-degree credentials or who seek to earn them while pursuing a degree. Without a better understanding of who these learners are and how

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6 World Economic Forum, *The Future of Jobs Report 2025* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2025), **https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025**.

7 Credential Engine, *Counting Credentials 2025* (Washington, DC: Credential Engine, 2025), **https://credentialengine.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Counting-Credentials-2025-Report.pdf**.

8 Thomas Bailey and Clive R. Belfield, *Stackable Credentials: Do They Have Labor Market Value?*, CCRC Working Paper No. 97 (New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2017), **https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED579160.pdf**.

9 Lindsay Daugherty et al., *Stackable Credential Pipelines and Equity for Low-Income Individuals: Evidence from Colorado and Ohio,* Research Report RR-A2484-1 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2023), **https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA2484-1.html**.

10 Guy Berger et al., *The Importance of Understanding Non-Degree Credential Quality* (Burning Glass Institute, 2024), **https://www.burningglassinstitute.org/research/the-importance-of-understanding-non-degree-credential-quality**.

they navigate their educational experiences, institutions may struggle to develop policies, services, and pathways that support them. In particular, enrollment management professionals make decisions about recruitment, retention, advising, transfer, workforce partnerships, and student success initiatives with limited understanding of their learners' non-degree credential attainment. Understanding the characteristics and experiences of college learners with non-degree credentials can help institutions anticipate changing enrollment patterns, identify opportunities for credential integration, and develop support services to evolve with learner needs. Such insights may also help institutions strengthen workforce partnerships, expand work-based learning opportunities, improve advising practices, and create clearer pathways between non-degree credentials and degree attainment. By exploring similarities and differences in learner profiles, educational processes, postsecondary progress, and future aspirations, this report contributes to research focused on evidence-based insights into college learners who hold or pursue non-degree credentials.

Figure 1: 4P's Enrollment Management Framework[11]



11 D. H. Kalsbeek, "Framing Retention for Institutional Improvement: A 4 Ps Framework," New Directions for Higher Education, no. 161 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20041.

Data and Methods

This study was guided by a central research question: How do the profiles, educational processes, postsecondary progress, and aspirations of college learners differ between those who have non-degree credentials and those without?

With this question in mind, a descriptive analysis of data from the Strada Education Foundation 2025 State Opportunity Index survey of college learners was conducted. Of the 56,609 total responses, 2,684 were excluded because they were seen but unanswered or left blank, leaving 53,926 responses for analysis. The large sample size enabled the analysis to compare respondents who reported holding one or more non-degree credentials with those who did not, and to categorize them according to the 4Ps Enrollment Management Framework that organizes learner experiences into four domains: profile, process, progress, and promise.[12] Profile refers to learners' demographic and educational characteristics, including age, gender, race or ethnicity, enrollment status, and employment status. Process focuses on how learners navigate postsecondary education, including their experiences with institutional systems, support services, and educational pathways. Progress examines how learners are advancing toward their educational goals and includes measures related to postsecondary momentum and educational attainment. Finally, promise focuses on learners' perceptions of future opportunities and outcomes, including educational aspirations, workforce preparation, and career prospects. By examining these dimensions, the study contributes to discussions about credential stacking and the role of non-degree credentials within postsecondary education pathways.

Examining multiple indicators within each domain provided a comprehensive picture of learner experiences and allowed assessment of patterns across different aspects of the educational journey. Data were also systematically reviewed and open-ended survey responses coded to classify non-degree credentials held by type, such as whether learners held certificates, certifications, and licenses. Additionally, survey weighting procedures generated estimates representative of respondents nationally by race or ethnicity, gender, institution type, and field of study.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. Most notably, the survey did not ask respondents when they received a non-degree credential. As a result, it is not possible to determine whether credential attainment occurred before degree program enrollment or during enrollment. Consequently, the analysis cannot fully capture the timing or sequencing of educational decisions associated with credential stacking. The findings should therefore be interpreted as providing a broad, cross-sectional portrait of college learners with non-degree credentials rather than a full explanation of how credentials influence educational pathways over time. Despite these limitations, the data offered important baseline insights into the characteristics, experiences, and aspirations of learners with non-degree credentials, and helped identify areas for future exploration.

12 D. H. Kalsbeek, "Framing Retention for Institutional Improvement: A 4 Ps Framework," *New Directions for Higher Education*, no. 161 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), **https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20041**.

Findings

Learners with Non-Degree Credentials at U.S. Two-Year Institutions

Overall, 12.7 percent of learners at U.S. two-year institutions reported holding a non-degree credential. Although learners with non-degree credentials represented a relatively small share of overall participants, several patterns emerged across their demographics, educational experiences, postsecondary progress, and future aspirations. At the same time, learners with and without non-degree credentials shared many similarities, suggesting that non-degree credential holders may not differ fundamentally from non-holders, but rather represent a group whose educational pathways and experiences warrant closer examination and understanding.

Profile

The profiles of learners with and without non-degree credentials at two-year institutions were broadly similar, particularly with respect to racial and ethnic composition and geographic characteristics. However, meaningful differences emerged in age, gender, family responsibilities, socioeconomic background, and fields of study. Women accounted for a considerably larger share of learners with non-degree credentials than learners without non-degree credentials, and non-degree credential holders were more highly represented among learners in their 30s and 40s than younger learners. Collectively, these patterns suggest that learners with non-degree credentials represent a distinct segment of the two-year college population.

Enrollment and family characteristics further differentiate learners with non-degree credentials from their peers without non-degree credentials. Learners with non-degree credentials made up a larger share of part-time learners and more often identified as parents. These findings suggest that many learners with non-degree credentials pursue education while balancing competing work, family, and caregiving responsibilities.

Socioeconomic differences were also evident. Although first-generation status differed only modestly between the two groups, learners with non-degree credentials were more represented among Pell Grant recipients and among those who were both first-generation students and Pell Grant recipients. Taken together, these findings suggest that learners with non-degree credentials more frequently reported characteristics associated with greater financial need.

Learners with non-degree credentials also exhibited a distinct academic profile. Their fields of study were more heavily concentrated in health and clinical programs, while learners without non-degree credentials were distributed more evenly across fields. This concentration in health-related disciplines reflects the strong connection between non-degree credentials and high-demand occupations, particularly in fields where certifications, licenses, and other non-degree credentials play an important role in employment and career advancement.

By contrast, geographic characteristics showed few differences between the two groups. Learners with and without non-degree credentials reported similar percentages of metropolitan residence and in-state enrollment. Transfer patterns were also generally comparable, although learners with non-degree credentials represented a somewhat larger share of students who had transferred from other institutions.

In summary, the profile findings indicate that a greater share of learners with non-degree credentials at U.S. two-year institutions were older learners, women, parents, part-time learners, Pell Grant recipients, and learners enrolled in health and clinical fields.

Process and Progress

College learners with and without non-degree credentials showed similar patterns in how they accessed and experienced their education. Across both groups, hybrid learning was the most common instructional modality, followed by fully in-person and fully online learning. This distribution suggests that flexible learning formats have become a standard feature of the two-year college experience, regardless of non-degree credential attainment.

Perceptions of affordability were also largely comparable between the two groups. Most learners with non-degree credentials described their education as affordable to some degree, and learners without non-degree credentials expressed similar sentiments. At the same time, nearly half of learners in both groups reported that postsecondary costs had interfered with their educational choices or progress toward graduation. These findings indicate that cost remains a significant consideration for many two-year college learners, even among those who generally perceive their education as affordable.

Enrollment continuity showed a somewhat greater difference. Learners with non-degree credentials indicated they paused their studies more often than those without non-degree credentials. This pattern aligns with the broader profile of non-degree credential holders, who reported being part of an older age group, held part-time status, and were parents, which suggests that interruptions in enrollment may be more common for this group of learners with this profile.

Learners with non-degree credentials also more often reported receiving personalized coaching to help them navigate education and career decisions. Across both groups, advisors, faculty, and family members were the most frequently cited sources of support. One notable distinction was that learners with non-degree credentials also cited employers and coworkers as sources of guidance. This finding, along with enrollment continuity data, also suggests that it may be more common for learners with non-degree credentials to already be working, either as part-time learners supporting families or in fields with greater demand for connections between education and employment (e.g., healthcare and information technology).

Participation in work-based learning experiences was broadly similar for learners with and without non-degree credentials. Both groups reported off-campus employment more often, and participation in

other activities such as practicums, internships, and on-campus employment was also reported. The quality of these experiences was also comparable, with many learners reporting engagement in higher-skill tasks or work that involved greater autonomy. Together, these findings suggest that learners across both groups had access to a range of opportunities that connected classroom learning with practical workplace experience.

Both groups reported comparable learning modalities, perceptions of affordability, sources of support, and participation in work-based learning. Where differences emerged, learners with non-degree credentials more often received personalized coaching from employers and coworkers and experienced interruptions in enrollment.

Promise

Learners with non-degree credentials expressed strong confidence in the value of their education and its ability to help them achieve their goals. Compared with learners without non-degree credentials, they indicated more often that their education would help them reach their personal and professional aspirations. Across both groups, most expressed positive views about the outcomes of their educational experience.

These positive perceptions also extended to views of educational value and return on investment. Most learners, regardless of non-degree credential status, agreed that their education would be worth the cost. Despite earlier findings showing that affordability remains a challenge for many learners, they generally view the benefits of their education as outweighing the financial investment required to attain it.

The non-degree credentials reported by learners at two-year institutions were concentrated in a relatively narrow set of credential types and occupational fields. Certifications were by far the most common credential held, followed by certificates and licenses. Additionally, nearly one-quarter of learners also reported holding multiple non-degree credentials. The concentration of credentials in healthcare and social service sectors, along with business and professional services, further highlights strong connections among credentials, occupational requirements, and employment opportunities.

Findings also revealed that learners may not always be able to distinguish between the various forms of non-degree credentials available to them. As a result, some credential types such as licenses and micro-credentials may be underreported. This ambiguity is common in the current U.S. credential landscape and highlights the challenges learners may face in adequately understanding and describing the credentials they have earned.

Looking ahead, learners with non-degree credentials appeared somewhat more focused on immediate workforce participation than their peers without non-degree credentials. While both groups' most common post-graduation plan was to seek employment, learners with non-degree credentials reported having already secured a job and less often planned additional education, though it is unclear whether the jobs

secured were high-quality or aligned with their career advancement within a field. This pattern aligns with the strong concentration of credential holders in high-demand fields and suggests that non-degree credentials serve not only as educational accomplishments but may also function as strategic tools for career advancement and labor market success.

Overall, learners with non-degree credentials are confident in the value of their education and optimistic about its role in helping them achieve their goals. Those with non-degree credentials have a higher attainment of certifications, more often in high-demand fields, with employment-focused post-graduation plans.



Learners with Non-Degree Credentials at U.S. Four-Year Institutions

Similar to the percentages observed among learners at U.S. two-year institutions, 10.9 percent of learners at U.S. four-year institutions reported having a non-degree credential. This group also shared several patterns with non-degree credential holders at U.S. two-year institutions and with non-holders at four-year institutions across demographic characteristics, educational experiences, postsecondary progress, and future aspirations. However, the distinctions between learners with and without non-degree credentials were generally more pronounced at two-year institutions than at four-year institutions, suggesting that institutional settings may play an important role in how non-degree credentials intersect with learners' educational pathways and experiences.

Profile

Learners with and without non-degree credentials at four-year institutions had largely similar profiles across most demographic, socioeconomic, academic, and geographic characteristics. Compared with the differences observed at two-year institutions, distinctions between credential holders and non-credential holders at four-year institutions were generally more modest, suggesting that non-degree credential holding status is more broadly distributed across the four-year learner population.

Racial and ethnic composition differed little between the two groups. Gender patterns were also similar, with women making up the majority of learners in both groups. Age differences were somewhat more noticeable, however. Learners with non-degree credentials were more highly represented among those older than age 29, whereas learners without non-degree credentials were more concentrated in younger ages. Although most learners with non-degree credentials were still between ages 20 and 29, these findings suggest that non-degree credential holders included a somewhat larger share of adult learners.

Enrollment patterns were also comparable. Nearly all learners in both groups attended full time, reflecting the traditional enrollment patterns often associated with four-year institutions. However, parenting status differed. Learners with non-degree credentials reported being parents more than learners without non-degree credentials. Although the percentage of learners with non-degree credentials who reported being parents at four-year institutions was lower than that of learners with non-degree credentials at two-year institutions, this finding further supports the idea that learners with non-degree credentials may be experiencing increased family responsibilities.

Unlike the patterns observed at two-year institutions, socioeconomic characteristics were similar between learners with and without non-degree credentials at four-year institutions. Percentages of first-generation status, Pell Grant receipt, and the combination of first-generation and Pell Grant receipt differed only marginally between the two groups. These findings suggest that non-degree credential attainment at four-year institutions is less concentrated among learners with particular socioeconomic backgrounds than at two-year institutions.

Academic profiles were also largely comparable. Learners with and without non-degree credentials reported similar concentrations in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), liberal arts and

social sciences, and business-related fields. This contrasts with the stronger concentration in health and clinical fields among credential holders at two-year institutions. The more even distribution of fields of study among learners at four-year institutions suggests that non-degree credentials are more commonly achieved or embedded across a wider range of sectors, rather than concentrated in a narrower set of high-demand fields.

Geographic characteristics likewise revealed more similarities than differences. Most learners with and without non-degree credentials attended metropolitan institutions and enrolled as in-state students. However, learners with non-degree credentials at four-year institutions were more geographically mobile than their peers at two-year institutions, with a larger share attending institutions outside their home state.

Transfer patterns provide further evidence that learners with non-degree credentials at four-year institutions may follow more varied educational pathways. Non-degree credential holders reported more often to have transferred from either a two-year institution or another four-year institution than learners without a non-degree credential. While most learners entered their institution directly, the higher prevalence of transfer experience among credential holders suggests that non-degree credential attainment may occur within broader or nonlinear educational or career trajectories.

These profile findings indicate that learners with non-degree credentials at four-year institutions closely resemble their peers without non-degree credentials across many characteristics. Where differences do emerge, non-degree credential holders indicated being older, being parents, and having transferred from another institution more often than those without non-degree credentials. Unlike the more distinct profile observed at two-year institutions, non-degree credential attainment at four-year institutions appears to be integrated across a broader cross-section of learners, academic fields, and educational pathways.

Process and Progress

Learners with and without non-degree credentials at four-year institutions reported similar educational experiences in terms of instructional modality, affordability, enrollment continuity, and participation in work-based learning. Hybrid learning was the most common instructional modality for both groups, followed by fully in-person learning and then fully online learning. Compared with learners at two-year institutions though, more learners at four-year institutions reported attending classes entirely in person, suggesting that traditional campus-based learning remains a prominent feature of the four-year college experience, even as online and hybrid options continue to increase in availability.

In terms of affordability, the majority of learners in both groups described their college experience as at least somewhat affordable, although a substantial proportion indicated that costs interfered with their educational choices or progress toward graduation. These findings highlight a growing tension among learners: while education is financially manageable overall, cost concerns continued to shape educational decision-making and progress.

Despite these affordability concerns, enrollment patterns remained relatively stable. Most learners with and without non-degree credentials reported continuous enrollment since beginning their studies, and interruption rates differed insignificantly. Compared with learners with non-degree credentials at two-year institutions, learners at four-year institutions reported higher rates of continuous enrollment, suggesting they may be more likely to persist through challenges without stopping out for any period of time.

Work-based learning experiences were common among all learners, but were particularly more prominent among those with non-degree credentials. Off-campus employment, paid internships, and on-campus employment were among the most frequently reported experiences, with participation levels generally



exceeding those observed among learners at two-year institutions. The prevalence of internships and other experiential learning opportunities suggests that learners at four-year institutions may have increased knowledge of or access to more career-development experiences that complement their academic coursework.

The quality of these experiences was also largely consistent between both groups. Many learners reported doing high-skill tasks under supervision, while others described experiences with greater autonomy. Relatively few reported primarily low-skill work. These findings indicate that the work-based learning experiences reported often provided meaningful opportunities to apply knowledge and develop professional skills, regardless of non-degree credential status.

Personalized coaching represented one area where slight differences emerged. Learners with non-degree credentials reported receiving personalized coaching somewhat more often than their peers without non-degree credentials. Across both groups though, advisors and faculty served as the primary sources of support. However, learners with non-degree credentials reported greater engagement with employers and coworkers for guidance, similar to learners with non-degree credentials at two-year institutions as well.

Learners with non-degree credentials at four-year institutions share many of the same educational experiences as their peers without non-degree credentials. While affordability concerns remained common, most learners remained continuously enrolled and engaged in educational work-based learning opportunities. Where differences emerged, learners with non-degree credentials were somewhat more connected to employer guidance, reinforcing the broader pattern that non-degree credentials can complement efforts toward career advancement.

Promise

Learners with non-degree credentials at four-year institutions generally viewed their education positively and expressed confidence that it would support their educational aspirations. Although learners with and without non-degree credentials reported similarly positive perceptions overall, learners with non-degree credentials were somewhat more likely to strongly agree that their education would help them achieve their aspirations.

Positive perceptions of educational value also extended to views about cost. Regardless of non-degree credential status, most learners at four-year institutions agreed that their education would be worth the financial investment. Despite earlier findings of affordability challenges and cost-related barriers, strong

agreement on educational value suggests learners generally believed the benefits justified the expense. This pattern highlights a perception of long-term value, as learners may recognize financial challenges while still viewing their education as a worthwhile investment.

Another notable difference between learners with non-degree credentials and those without is their post-graduation plans. While most learners with and without non-degree credentials planned to seek employment after graduation, learners with non-degree credentials more often reported securing a job before completing their degree. However, it was unclear whether these jobs were high-quality, aligned with their career goals, or supported advancement within a field. Likewise, plans to seek additional education after graduation were similar across both groups, suggesting that both credential holders and non-credential holders viewed further learning as a viable option. However, the higher job acceptance percentages among learners with non-degree credentials may indicate that these credentials provide a viable way to signal skills and qualifications to employers even though they have not yet completed a degree program.

In terms of credential type, learners at four-year institutions primarily held certifications and certificates, with certifications being the most common. A notable share of learners also reported holding multiple non-degree credentials. Similar to patterns observed at two-year institutions, the largest concentrations of credentials by industry type were found in healthcare and social services, business and professional, and information technology fields, which typically have strong connections to workforce preparation and occupations where non-degree credentials can complement degree attainment. As with learners at two-year institutions, a notable proportion of learners at four-year institutions reported earning a credential but could not clearly identify the credential type, further highlighting the ongoing challenge of defining and classifying non-degree credentials.

Overall, learners with non-degree credentials at four-year institutions were highly confident in the value of their education and optimistic about its contribution to their future goals. Their concentration in credential types and fields aligned with high-demand occupations, combined with higher pre-graduation employment rates, suggests that non-degree credentials may complement degree programs by providing earlier opportunities to demonstrate skills, strengthen career readiness, and support transitions into the workforce.

Considerations and Recommendations

To address the question of how college learners with non-degree credentials differ from their peers without credentials, this study compared their profiles, educational experiences, postsecondary progress, and future aspirations. The results indicate that, despite many similarities across both institution types, learners with non-degree credentials had several important differences.

At two-year institutions, learners with non-degree credentials were more often older, female, parents, part-time, Pell Grant recipients, and more concentrated in high-demand fields, particularly health and clinical programs, than those without non-degree credentials. At four-year institutions, profile differences between learners with and without non-degree credentials were generally less pronounced, although learners with non-degree credentials somewhat more often reported being older, having transferred between institutions, and being parents.

Additionally, learners with non-degree credentials at both institution types showed stronger connections to workforce preparation. They reported greater engagement with personalized coaching, particularly among employers and coworkers, and pursued educational pathways more closely aligned with high-demand fields. Both sets of learners with non-degree credentials also reported higher confidence that their education would help them achieve their goals and be worth the cost, along with somewhat stronger employment outcomes and expectations than their peers without non-degree credentials.

Taken together, these differences suggest that non-degree credentials can complement degree attainment, particularly for learners seeking workforce-ready skills, career advancement, and more pathways into employment. While the profiles of learners with and without non-degree credentials often overlapped, credential holders, especially at two-year institutions, appeared to represent a population with more distinct educational, economic, and career circumstances.

Drawing on these insights, the following recommendations aim to help postsecondary institutions better identify, recruit, support, and serve learners with non-degree credentials or who may pursue them as part of their educational journey while enrolled. It may be useful to note that some of these recommendations may be more relevant depending on institutional type and current institutional priorities.

Profile

Improve identification of learners with non-degree credentials through institutional data collection and enrollment processes. Institutions should collect and review information on non-degree credential attainment of enrollees during admission, orientation, and advising sessions to better understand this learner population's characteristics, needs, and educational goals.

Strengthen support services that better address the realities of adult learners. Learners with non-degree credentials, particularly at two-year institutions, were more often identified as older, parents, part-time, and Pell Grant recipients. Institutions should explore ways to further strengthen scheduling options, virtual services, childcare support, and targeted outreach to help learners balance education with increased work and family responsibilities.

Integrate more non-degree credentials into educational pathways. Non-degree credential attainment was reported across institution types, learner populations, and academic fields, suggesting they are becoming an integral part of the postsecondary experience. Institutions should consider how non-degree credentials fit within degree pathways, advising structures, and student success initiatives rather than treating them as separate or peripheral educational experiences.

Process and Progress

Expand access to career-connected advising and personalized guidance. Learners with non-degree credentials reported greater engagement with personalized coaching, particularly from advisors, faculty, employers, and coworkers. Institutions should further explore more personalized coaching opportunities to strengthen advising and program models that connect academic planning, non-degree credentials, and workforce experiences at strategic points throughout the learner journey.

Address affordability challenges while supporting continuous enrollment. Many learners reported that costs influenced their educational decisions and progress, even when they viewed their education as worthwhile. Institutions should further strengthen financial aid advising, emergency assistance programs, and flexible enrollment options to help learners persist toward completion while managing increasing financial costs.

Strengthen transfer and credit for prior learning opportunities. Transfer rates among learners with non-degree credentials suggest that many navigate multiple educational experiences on their path to degree attainment. Institutions should seek to strengthen articulation agreements, award credit for relevant non-degree credentials, and explore other options connected to credit for prior learning.

Promise

Create intentional credential-stacking pathways. A notable share of learners with non-degree credentials reported holding multiple non-degree credentials, indicating that many are already combining credentials as part of their educational journey. To build on this credential-stacking ability, institutions should design pathways that intentionally connect appropriate non-degree credentials with degree programs and career advancement opportunities.

Communicate how degree and non-degree credentials can complement one another. Learners with non-degree credentials generally viewed their education positively and more often pursued credentials in high-demand fields like healthcare or information technology. To better communicate the connection between non-degree credentials and degrees, institutions should help learners understand how different credential types can work together to support educational and career pathways.

Improve institutional tracking and classification of non-degree credentials. A meaningful share of learners reported earning a non-degree credential but could not clearly articulate the credential type. Institutions should implement consistent, learner-facing explanations and develop data systems that more accurately track non-degree credential attainment across programs and departments.

Conclusion

As non-degree credentials continue to increase in prominence and importance in postsecondary education and workforce development, understanding learners' experiences with them has become more important than ever. This study uncovered areas where learners with non-degree credentials shared similarities with their peers without non-degree credentials at both two-year and four-year institutions—both groups generally viewed their education positively, believed their educational experiences would help them achieve their goals, and expressed confidence that their education would be worth the cost. These similarities suggest that learners with non-degree credentials may not be fundamentally different from other college learners. Rather, they represent a distinct segment of the learner population whose needs and educational experiences warrant greater attention from institutions, workforce stakeholders, and policymakers.

On the other hand, some key differences emerged, particularly at two-year institutions where a greater number of learners with non-degree credentials reported being older, enrolled part-time, parents, and receiving Pell Grants than their peers without non-degree credentials. There were similar differences between learners with and without non-degree credentials at four-year institutions, but they were a little less striking. Overall, these findings indicate that learners with non-degree credentials more frequently balance educational goals alongside competing work, family, and financial responsibilities.

Collectively, these findings suggest that non-degree credentials are increasingly important parts of educational and career pathways rather than standalone achievements, and have important implications for postsecondary institutions. As attention to non-degree credential attainment grows, institutions may benefit by improving efforts to identify learners with non-degree credentials, recognizing the diverse pathways through which they enter and progress through postsecondary institutions, and developing support services that respond to their needs. Expanding access to personalized coaching, employer engagement, and work-based learning opportunities may further help learners connect educational experiences with workforce outcomes.

Similarly, clearer and more easily accessible information about pathways that integrate non-degree credentials within degree programs can help learners make better-informed decisions about how various credentials can support their educational progression and career goals. As employers, policymakers, and educational institutions place increasing emphasis on skills, competencies, and workforce readiness, understanding the experiences of learners who combine non-degree credentials with degree attainment is increasingly important. By better recognizing and supporting these learners, institutions and policymakers can better help to bridge the gap between educational journeys and career success.

Data Tables[13]

Data Comparison Across All Four Groups

Category	Two-Year Degree With NDC	Two-Year Degree Without NDC	Four-Year Degree With NDC	Four-Year Degree Without NDC
Nationally	12.7%	87.3%	10.9%	89.1%
Race or Ethnicity				
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5%	1.0%	0.3%	0.4%
Asian	17.2%	6.8%	7.7%	10.0%
Black or African American	8.7%	12.5%	10.4%	8.8%
Hispanic or Latino	14.8%	28.5%	18.5%	18.6%
Middle Eastern	0.9%	0.7%	1.0%	1.4%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
White	51.1%	44.0%	55.4%	54.3%
Two or more races	5.0%	4.2%	4.9%	4.4%
Other or unknown	1.4%	2.1%	1.7%	1.9%
Gender				
Female	64.9%	54.1%	56.1%	55.5%
Male	33.0%	43.4%	41.3%	41.4%
Other or self-described	2.0%	2.3%	2.5%	3.1%
Age Range				
15-19	13.3%	18.9%	1.8%	3.1%
20-29	47.0%	61.4%	83.8%	91.3%
30-39	19.4%	12.4%	8.7%	3.7%
40-49	12.3%	4.9%	3.9%	1.2%
50-59	6.0%	2.1%	1.4%	0.5%
60-69	1.6%	0.4%	0.5%	0.1%
70-79	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Full-Time or Part-Time Status				

13 Author's note: Some subtotals may differ based on responses that were seen but not answered, which were excluded from the analysis. Additionally, the numbers included in the tables may not equal exactly 100 percent due to rounding to the nearest tenth. In these tables, "NDC" is an acronym for "non-degree credential."

Category	Two-Year Degree With NDC	Two-Year Degree Without NDC	Four-Year Degree With NDC	Four-Year Degree Without NDC
Full-time	64.0%	72.3%	92.3%	95.4%
Part-time	36.1%	27.7%	7.8%	4.6%
Parent Status				
Yes	39.4%	20.6%	12.9%	5.4%
First-Generation Status				
Yes	55.7%	53.2%	31.8%	31.4%
Pell Grant Status				
Yes	65.5%	56.7%	45.2%	40.5%
First-Generation and Pell Grant Status				
Yes	40.6%	34.6%	22.5%	22.1%
Fields of Study				
Liberal Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences	12.3%	17.5%	21.0%	24.6%
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)	16.5%	19.5%	28.1%	28.5%
Health and Clinical	33.4%	19.9%	15.6%	10.3%
Business and Professional Fields	14.6%	18.3%	20.0%	20.2%
Education and Human Services	7.0%	6.7%	7.0%	6.3%
Trades, Technical, and Applied Fields	12.7%	10.0%	5.4%	6.0%
Arts and Creative Fields	2.2%	4.0%	2.0%	2.6%
Other or Nontraditional Fields	1.6%	4.3%	0.9%	1.5%
Institutional Setting				
Metropolitan	82.9%	81.0%	81.2%	84.3%
Non-metropolitan	17.1%	19.0%	18.7%	15.7%
Transfer Status				
Yes, transfer from a two-year institution	14.3%	10.5%	24.3%	18.2%
Yes, transfer from a four-year institution	10.8%	9.2%	10.8%	9.7%
Residency				
In-state student	95.4%	90.0%	79.3%	76.6%
Out-of-state student	3.3%	5.5%	17.6%	19.6%
International student	1.3%	4.5%	3.1%	3.8%
Course Delivery				
I attended all classes in-person	26.3%	25.9%	36.7%	42.3%

Category	Two-Year Degree With NDC	Two-Year Degree Without NDC	Four-Year Degree With NDC	Four-Year Degree Without NDC
I attended all classes online	24.5%	22.9%	13.6%	9.3%
I attended some classes online and some in-person	49.1%	51.2%	49.7%	48.4%
Affordability				
Extremely affordable	15.6%	16.9%	9.9%	8.9%
Very affordable	22.6%	26.8%	17.8%	18.9%
Somewhat affordable	44.5%	40.2%	45.3%	45.8%
Not very affordable	12.4%	11.5%	20.6%	20.0%
Not at all affordable	4.9%	4.6%	6.4%	6.3%
Affordability Affected Education				
Yes	48.1%	44.9%	45.3%	40.4%
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)				
Yes	25.5%	20.1%	12.7%	10.5%
Gap Year (GAP)				
No, I have been enrolled continuously since I started school	65.2%	73.2%	87.1%	89.0%
Yes, I have paused taking courses for at least half a year during my time at school	34.8%	26.8%	12.9%	11.0%
Personalized Coaching				
Yes	50.6%	43.9%	39.3%	33.7%
Types of Personalized Coaching Received				
Advisors	73.7%	71.2%	74.1%	69.4%
Faculty	46.9%	41.0%	57.8%	51.7%
School website	25.5%	25.0%	25.1%	20.9%
Non-school website	12.0%	12.3%	14.7%	11.8%
Social media	9.7%	14.9%	19.8%	19.2%
Friend	38.5%	39.2%	46.2%	47.4%
Family	42.0%	41.9%	43.7%	45.9%
Employer or coworker	25.3%	13.1%	29.8%	20.5%
Community organization	13.4%	8.8%	16.9%	11.8%
Other	7.6%	5.6%	7.3%	4.7%
Participation in Work-Based Learning Experiences				
Paid internship	9.6%	14.2%	39.1%	36.9%
Unpaid internship	9.8%	7.6%	26.4%	24.6%

Category	Two-Year Degree With NDC	Two-Year Degree Without NDC	Four-Year Degree With NDC	Four-Year Degree Without NDC
Micro internship	1.8%	2.0%	2.7%	2.8%
Apprenticeship	4.2%	3.0%	4.0%	3.3%
Co-op	2.5%	3.0%	3.6%	3.4%
Practicum	15.5%	8.8%	23.2%	17.9%
Project-based	12.6%	7.7%	30.1%	19.9%
Service learning	7.2%	5.2%	15.6%	11.5%
Undergraduate research	5.9%	3.5%	26.5%	21.9%
On-campus job	11.0%	9.5%	35.3%	33.2%
Off-campus job	31.4%	28.2%	47.7%	41.6%
Types of Work-Based Learning Tasks				
Autonomous work	32.3%	22.6%	27.3%	23.3%
High-skill tasks with supervision	34.1%	36.8%	42.8%	39.0%
Job shadowing	8.6%	11.6%	7.0%	9.7%
Low-skill tasks with supervision	25.0%	29.0%	22.8%	28.1%
Education Will Help Achieve my Goals				
Strongly agree	65.6%	58.8%	60.3%	54.9%
Somewhat agree	18.8%	25.4%	28.2%	32.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	4.2%	4.9%	3.8%	4.9%
Somewhat disagree	2.0%	3.0%	2.5%	3.3%
Strongly disagree	9.4%	7.9%	5.2%	5.0%
Education Will be Worth the Cost				
Strongly agree	47.8%	45.3%	38.8%	35.0%
Somewhat agree	29.2%	30.9%	36.7%	37.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	10.7%	12.1%	9.9%	13.0%
Somewhat disagree	5.2%	5.9%	9.9%	10.1%
Strongly disagree	7.1%	5.8%	4.7%	4.7%
Non-Degree Credential Type				
Badges	0.2%	-	0.2%	-
Certificates	16.8%	-	20.4%	-

Category	Two-Year Degree With NDC	Two-Year Degree Without NDC	Four-Year Degree With NDC	Four-Year Degree Without NDC
Certifications	56.1%	-	52.2%	-
Licenses	6.8%	-	5.5%	-
Microcredential	0.1%	-	0.5%	-
Not specified	20.0%	-	21.1%	-
Industries Represented in Non-Degree Credentials Reported				
Business and professional services	18.7%	-	29.5%	-
Creative and communications	4.2%	-	4.5%	-
Healthcare and social services	47.2%	-	38.4%	-
Hospitality and culinary	2.7%	-	2.1%	-
Information technology (IT)	8.3%	-	9.2%	-
Public safety and legal	6.0%	-	8.2%	-
Skilled trades and manufacturing	6.1%	-	2.4%	-
Not specified	6.8%	-	5.8%	-
Multiple Non-Degree Credentials				
Yes	23.8%	-	20.6%	-
Future Plans				
I am not yet sure what I plan to do after graduating	9.7%	11.2%	4.9%	6.9%
I have been admitted to a program for additional education	7.9%	10.3%	11.9%	13.0%
I have plans other than working or additional education	4.1%	4.5%	1.6%	2.1%
I plan to pursue additional education, but have not yet been admitted	21.3%	24.8%	16.6%	17.0%
I plan to work, but have not yet secured a position	41.4%	37.9%	40.8%	43.6%
I have accepted a job	15.7%	11.3%	24.2%	17.4%

Data about Learners with Non-Degree Credentials at U.S. Two-Year Institutions

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Nationally	12.7%	1,060,079	8,363,278
Race or Ethnicity			
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5%	5,060	1,060,079
Asian	17.2%	181,878	1,060,079
Black or African American	8.7%	92,553	1,060,079
Hispanic or Latino	14.8%	157,401	1,060,079
Middle Eastern	0.9%	9,227	1,060,079
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.4%	3,801	1,060,079
White	51.1%	542,215	1,060,079
Two or more races	5.0%	52,583	1,060,079
Other or unknown	1.4%	15,361	1,060,079
Gender			
Female	64.9%	688,357	1,060,079
Male	33.0%	350,205	1,060,079
Other or self-described	2.0%	21,518	1,060,079
Age Range			
15-19	13.3%	128,813	966,527
20-29	47.0%	454,697	966,527
30-39	19.4%	187,903	966,527
40-49	12.3%	118,572	966,527
50-59	6.0%	58,089	966,527
60-69	1.6%	15,239	966,527
70-79	0.3%	3,214	966,527
Full-Time or Part-Time Status			
Full-time	64.0%	675,176	1,055,525
Part-time	36.1%	380,527	1,055,525
Parent Status			
Yes	39.4%	417,406	1,059,780
First-Generation Status			
Yes	55.7%	589,363	1,058,796

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Pell Grant Status			
Yes	64.5%	679,540	1,053,541
First-Generation and Pell Grant Status			
Yes	40.6%	427,345	1,052,735
Fields of Study			
Liberal Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences	12.3%	130,213	1,060,079
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)	16.5%	174,511	1,060,079
Health and Clinical	33.4%	354,021	1,060,079
Business and Professional Fields	14.6%	154,474	1,060,079
Education and Human Services	7.0%	74,512	1,060,079
Trades, Technical, and Applied Fields	12.7%	134,755	1,060,079
Arts and Creative Fields	2.2%	23,107	1,060,079
Other or Nontraditional Fields	1.6%	16,686	1,060,079
Institutional Setting			
Metropolitan	82.9%	878,727	1,060,079
Non-metropolitan	17.1%	181,352	1,060,079
Transfer Status			
Yes, transfer from a two-year institution	14.3%	151,065	1,055,790
Yes, transfer from a four-year institution	10.8%	113,765	1,055,790
Residency			
In-state student	95.4%	1,008,859	1,057,453
Out-of-state student	3.3%	34,461	1,057,453
International student	1.3%	14,133	1,057,453
Course Delivery			
I attended all classes in-person	26.3%	278,523	1,057,746
I attended all classes online	24.5%	259,413	1,057,746
I attended some classes online and some in-person	49.1%	519,810	1,057,746
Affordability			
Extremely affordable	15.6%	164,423	1,055,124
Very affordable	22.6%	238,448	1,055,124
Somewhat affordable	44.5%	469,940	1,055,124
Not very affordable	12.4%	131,109	1,055,124
Not at all affordable	4.9%	51,204	1,055,124
Affordability Affected Education			
Yes	48.1%	509,670	1,060,079

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)			
Yes	25.5%	267,322	1,047,939
Gap Year			
No, I have been enrolled continuously since I started school	65.2%	685,862	1,052,650
Yes, I have paused taking courses for at least half a year during my time at school	34.8%	366,789	1,052,650
Personalized Coaching			
Yes	50.6%	535,654	1,058,621
Types of Personalized Coaching Received			
Advisors	73.7%	394,677	535,654
Faculty	46.9%	251,096	535,654
School website	25.5%	136,533	535,654
Non-school website	12.0%	64,242	535,654
Social media	9.7%	51,767	535,654
Friend	38.5%	206,374	535,654
Family	42.0%	224,793	535,654
Employer or coworker	25.3%	135,390	535,654
Community organization	13.4%	71,638	535,654
Other	7.6%	40,618	535,654
Participation in Work-Based Learning Experiences			
Paid internship	9.6%	99,365	1,031,652
Unpaid internship	9.8%	100,627	1,031,652
Micro internship	1.8%	18,446	1,031,652
Apprenticeship	4.2%	42,838	1,031,652
Co-op	2.5%	25,338	1,031,652
Practicum	15.5%	160,309	1,031,652
Project-based	12.6%	129,877	1,031,652
Service learning	7.2%	74,714	1,031,652
Undergraduate research	5.9%	60,838	1,031,652
On-campus job	11.0%	113,861	1,031,652
Off-campus job	31.4%	323,929	1,031,652

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Types of Work-Based Learning Tasks			
Autonomous work	32.3%	211,822	655,990
High-skill tasks with supervision	34.1%	223,753	655,990
Job shadowing	8.6%	56,147	655,990
Low-skill tasks with supervision	25.0%	164,269	655,990
Education Will Help Achieve my Goals			
Strongly agree	65.6%	695,553	1,060,079
Somewhat agree	18.8%	199,142	1,060,079
Neither agree nor disagree	4.2%	44,309	1,060,079
Somewhat disagree	2.0%	20,948	1,060,079
Strongly disagree	9.4%	100,127	1,060,079
Education Will be Worth the Cost			
Strongly agree	47.8%	506,603	1,059,263
Somewhat agree	29.2%	309,156	1,059,263
Neither agree nor disagree	10.7%	113,504	1,059,263
Somewhat disagree	5.2%	54,780	1,059,263
Strongly disagree	7.1%	75,398	1,059,263
Non-Degree Credential Type			
Badges	0.2%	1,721	1,060,079
Certificates	16.8%	177,702	1,060,079
Certifications	56.1%	595,053	1,060,079
Licenses	6.8%	72,279	1,060,079
Microcredential	0.1%	1,139	1,060,079
Not specified	20.0%	212,185	1,060,079
Industries Represented in Non-Degree Credentials Reported			
Business and professional services	18.7%	198,204	1,060,079
Creative and communications	4.2%	44,918	1,060,079
Healthcare and social services	47.2%	500,007	1,060,079
Hospitality and culinary	2.7%	28,918	1,060,079
Information technology (IT)	8.3%	88,241	1,060,079
Public safety and legal	6.0%	63,728	1,060,079
Skilled trades and manufacturing	6.1%	64,285	1,060,079
Not specified	6.8%	71,778	1,060,079
Multiple Non-Degree Credentials			
Yes	23.8%	252,092	1,060,079

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Future Plans			
I am not yet sure what I plan to do after graduating	9.7%	102,343	1,057,781
I have been admitted to a program for additional education	7.9%	83,723	1,057,781
I have plans other than working or additional education	4.1%	43,365	1,057,781
I plan to pursue additional education, but have not yet been admitted	21.3%	225,439	1,057,781
I plan to work, but have not yet secured a position	41.4%	437,521	1,057,781
I have accepted a job	15.7%	165,568	1,057,781

Data about Learners without Non-Degree Credentials at U.S. Two-Year Institutions

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Nationally	87.3%	7,303,199	8,363,278
Race or Ethnicity			
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.0%	70,755	7,303,199
Asian	6.8%	497,566	7,303,199
Black or African American	12.5%	912,836	7,303,199
Hispanic or Latino	28.5%	2,078,512	7,303,199
Middle Eastern	0.7%	50,850	7,303,199
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.3%	20,436	7,303,199
White	44.0%	3,211,042	7,303,199
Two or more races	4.2%	305,196	7,303,199
Other or unknown	2.1%	156,006	7,303,199
Gender			
Female	54.1%	3,948,626	7,303,199
Male	43.4%	3,166,056	7,303,199
Other or self-described	2.3%	166,979	7,303,199
Age Range			
15-19	18.9%	1,271,251	6,738,989
20-29	61.4%	4,134,990	6,738,989
30-39	12.4%	838,746	6,738,989
40-49	4.9%	330,255	6,738,989
50-59	2.1%	138,520	6,738,989
60-69	0.4%	24,591	6,738,989
70-79	0.0%	1,847	6,738,989
Full-Time or Part-Time Status			
Full-time	72.3%	5,232,202	7,241,223
Part-time	27.7%	2,009,021	7,241,223
Parent Status			
Yes	20.6%	1,503,893	7,285,000
First-Generation Status			
Yes	53.2%	3,871,393	7,277,604

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Pell Grant Status			
Yes	56.7%	4,079,975	7,192,097
First-Generation and Pell Grant Status			
Yes	34.6%	2,479,375	7,175,636
Fields of Study			
Liberal Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences	17.5%	1,275,520	7,303,199
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)	19.5%	1,422,348	7,303,199
Health and Clinical	19.9%	1,450,121	7,303,199
Business and Professional Fields	18.3%	1,337,708	7,303,199
Education and Human Services	6.7%	487,685	7,303,199
Trades, Technical, and Applied Fields	10.0%	728,056	7,303,199
Arts and Creative Fields	4.0%	290,344	7,303,199
Other or Nontraditional Fields	4.3%	311,417	7,303,199
Institutional Setting			
Metropolitan	81.0%	5,918,758	7,303,199
Non-metropolitan	19.0%	1,384,441	7,303,199
Transfer Status			
Yes, transfer from a two-year institution	10.5%	758,661	7,242,562
Yes, transfer from a four-year institution	9.2%	668,938	7,242,562
Residency			
In-state student	90.0%	6,528,384	7,251,033
Out-of-state student	5.5%	398,948	7,251,033
International student	4.5%	323,702	7,251,033
Course Delivery			
I attended all classes in-person	25.9%	1,877,421	7,243,870
I attended all classes online	22.9%	1,658,610	7,243,870
I attended some classes online and some in-person	51.2%	3,707,838	7,243,870
Affordability			
Extremely affordable	16.9%	1,221,148	7,237,355
Very affordable	26.8%	1,937,361	7,237,355
Somewhat affordable	40.2%	2,911,902	7,237,355
Not very affordable	11.5%	831,327	7,237,355
Not at all affordable	4.6%	335,616	7,237,355

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Affordability Affected Education			
Yes	44.9%	3,280,533	7,303,199
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)			
Yes	20.1%	1,452,472	7,234,110
Gap Year			
No, I have been enrolled continuously since I started school	73.2%	5,295,386	7,231,408
Yes, I have paused taking courses for at least half a year during my time at school	26.8%	1,936,022	7,231,408
Personalized Coaching			
Yes	43.9%	3,194,045	7,281,947
Types of Personalized Coaching Received			
Advisors	71.2%	2,273,112	3,193,411
Faculty	41.0%	1,309,284	3,193,411
School website	25.0%	798,749	3,193,411
Non-school website	12.3%	393,114	3,193,411
Social media	14.9%	475,806	3,193,411
Friend	39.2%	1,252,860	3,193,411
Family	41.9%	1,339,097	3,193,411
Employer or coworker	13.1%	419,146	3,193,411
Community organization	8.8%	281,560	3,193,411
Other	5.6%	178,636	3,193,411
Participation in Work-Based Learning Experiences			
Paid internship	14.2%	928,630	6,518,715
Unpaid internship	7.6%	496,313	6,518,715
Micro internship	2.0%	131,959	6,518,715
Apprenticeship	3.0%	192,350	6,518,715
Co-op	3.0%	196,341	6,518,715
Practicum	8.8%	571,337	6,518,715
Project-based	7.7%	499,815	6,518,715
Service learning	5.2%	336,791	6,518,715
Undergraduate research	3.5%	226,615	6,518,715
On-campus job	9.5%	617,351	6,518,715
Off-campus job	28.2%	1,839,330	6,518,715

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Types of Work-Based Learning Tasks			
Autonomous work	22.6%	906,612	4,015,382
High-skill tasks with supervision	36.8%	1,478,455	4,015,382
Job shadowing	11.6%	465,638	4,015,382
Low-skill tasks with supervision	29.0%	1,164,678	4,015,382
Education Will Help Achieve my Goals			
Strongly agree	58.8%	4,289,022	7,297,305
Somewhat agree	25.4%	1,855,554	7,297,305
Neither agree nor disagree	4.9%	354,644	7,297,305
Somewhat disagree	3.0%	218,535	7,297,305
Strongly disagree	7.9%	579,549	7,297,305
Education Will be Worth the Cost			
Strongly agree	45.3%	3,309,040	7,299,253
Somewhat agree	30.9%	2,256,368	7,299,253
Neither agree nor disagree	12.1%	885,133	7,299,253
Somewhat disagree	5.9%	427,103	7,299,253
Strongly disagree	5.8%	421,609	7,299,253
Future Plans			
I am not yet sure what I plan to do after graduating	11.2%	811,168	7,266,832
I have been admitted to a program for additional education	10.3%	747,038	7,266,832
I have plans other than working or additional education	4.5%	326,296	7,266,832
I plan to pursue additional education, but have not yet been admitted	24.8%	1,805,416	7,266,832
I plan to work, but have not yet secured a position	37.9%	2,753,786	7,266,832
I have accepted a job	11.3%	823,128	7,266,832

Data about Learners with Non-Degree Credentials at U.S. Four-Year Institutions

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Nationally	10.9%	133,839	1,230,162
Race or Ethnicity			
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.3%	342	133,839
Asian	7.7%	10,297	133,839
Black or African American	10.4%	13,874	133,839
Hispanic or Latino	18.5%	24,816	133,839
Middle Eastern	1.0%	1,356	133,839
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.1%	143	133,839
White	55.4%	74,097	133,839
Two or more races	4.9%	6,609	133,839
Other or unknown	1.7%	2,304	133,839
Gender			
Female	56.1%	74,794	133,218
Male	41.3%	54,985	133,218
Other or self-described	2.5%	3,394	133,218
Age Range			
15-19	1.8%	2,265	126,603
20-29	83.8%	106,067	126,603
30-39	8.7%	10,952	126,603
40-49	3.9%	4,921	126,603
50-59	1.4%	1,799	126,603
60-69	0.5%	580	126,603
70-79	0.0%	63	126,603
Full-Time or Part-Time Status			
Full-time	92.3%	123,253	133,589
Part-time	7.8%	10,380	133,589
Parent Status			
Yes	12.9%	17,222	133,787
First-Generation Status			
Yes	31.8%	42,442	133,614

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Pell Grant Status			
Yes	45.2%	60,134	132,947
First-Generation and Pell Grant Status			
Yes	22.5%	28,256	125,361
Fields of Study			
Liberal Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences	21.0%	28,146	133,839
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)	28.1%	37,554	133,839
Health and Clinical	15.6%	20,874	133,839
Business and Professional Fields	20.0%	26,810	133,839
Education and Human Services	7.0%	9,392	133,839
Trades, Technical, and Applied Fields	5.4%	7,172	133,839
Arts and Creative Fields	2.0%	2,622	133,839
Other or Nontraditional Fields	0.9%	1,269	133,839
Institutional Setting			
Metropolitan	81.2%	108,702	133,839
Non-metropolitan	18.7%	25,092	133,839
Transfer Status			
Yes, transfer from a two-year institution	24.3%	32,451	133,547
Yes, transfer from a four-year institution	10.8%	14,407	133,547
Residency			
In-state student	79.3%	106,067	133,812
Out-of-state student	17.6%	23,566	133,812
International student	3.1%	4,135	133,812
Course Delivery			
I attended all classes in-person	36.7%	49,100	133,726
I attended all classes online	13.6%	18,137	133,726
I attended some classes online and some in-person	49.7%	66,489	133,726
Affordability			
Extremely affordable	9.9%	13,277	133,541
Very affordable	17.8%	23,798	133,541
Somewhat affordable	45.3%	60,430	133,541
Not very affordable	20.6%	27,534	133,541
Not at all affordable	6.4%	8,504	133,541

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Affordability Affected Education			
Yes	45.3%	60,656	133,767
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)			
Yes	12.7%	16,925	133,084
Gap Year			
No, I have been enrolled continuously since I started school	87.1%	116,078	133,301
Yes, I have paused taking courses for at least half a year during my time at school	12.9%	17,222	133,301
Personalized Coaching			
Yes	39.3%	52,429	133,576
Types of Personalized Coaching Received			
Advisors	74.1%	38,859	52,430
Faculty	57.8%	30,319	52,430
School website	25.1%	13,169	52,430
Non-school website	14.7%	7,691	52,430
Social media	19.8%	10,404	52,430
Friend	46.2%	24,226	52,430
Family	43.7%	22,928	52,430
Employer or coworker	29.8%	15,611	52,430
Community organization	16.9%	8,869	52,430
Other	7.3%	3,812	52,430
Participation in Work-Based Learning Experiences			
Paid internship	39.1%	51,092	130,533
Unpaid internship	26.4%	34,484	130,578
Micro internship	2.7%	3,571	130,578
Apprenticeship	4.0%	5,259	130,578
Co-op	3.6%	4,660	130,578
Practicum	23.2%	30,268	130,578
Project-based	30.1%	39,299	130,578
Service learning	15.6%	20,305	130,578
Undergraduate research	26.5%	34,653	130,578
On-campus job	35.3%	46,136	130,578
Off-campus job	47.7%	62,308	130,578

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Types of Work-Based Learning Tasks			
Autonomous work	27.3%	33,583	122,825
High-skill tasks with supervision	42.8%	52,577	122,825
Job shadowing	7.0%	8,606	122,825
Low-skill tasks with supervision	22.8%	28,015	122,825
Education Will Help Achieve my Goals			
Strongly agree	60.3%	80,639	133,718
Somewhat agree	28.2%	37,734	133,718
Neither agree nor disagree	3.8%	5,048	133,718
Somewhat disagree	2.5%	3,327	133,718
Strongly disagree	5.2%	6,970	133,718
Education Will be Worth the Cost			
Strongly agree	38.8%	51,898	133,822
Somewhat agree	36.7%	49,125	133,822
Neither agree nor disagree	9.9%	13,241	133,822
Somewhat disagree	9.9%	13,272	133,822
Strongly disagree	4.7%	6,285	133,822
Non-Degree Credential Type			
Badges	0.2%	246	133,839
Certificates	20.4%	27,282	133,839
Certifications	52.2%	69,930	133,839
Licenses	5.5%	7,420	133,839
Microcredential	0.5%	730	133,839
Not specified	21.1%	28,229	133,839
Industries Represented in Non-Degree Credentials Reported			
Business and professional services	29.5%	39,458	133,839
Creative and communications	4.5%	6,003	133,839
Healthcare and social services	38.4%	51,328	133,839
Hospitality and culinary	2.1%	2,783	133,839
Information technology (IT)	9.2%	12,255	133,839
Public safety and legal	8.2%	11,015	133,839
Skilled trades and manufacturing	2.4%	3,168	133,839
Not specified	5.8%	7,829	133,839

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Multiple Non-Degree Credentials			
Yes	20.6%	27,614	133,839
Future Plans			
I am not yet sure what I plan to do after graduating	4.9%	6,557	133,707
I have been admitted to a program for additional education	11.9%	15,846	133,707
I have plans other than working or additional education	1.6%	2,078	133,707
I plan to pursue additional education, but have not yet been admitted	16.6%	22,225	133,707
I plan to work, but have not yet secured a position	40.8%	54,616	133,707
I have accepted a job	24.2%	32,384	133,707

Data about Learners without Non-Degree Credentials at U.S. Four-Year Institutions

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Nationally	89.1%	1,096,323	1,230,162
Race or Ethnicity			
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.4%	4,719	1,096,323
Asian	10.0%	109,395	1,096,323
Black or African American	8.8%	96,867	1,096,323
Hispanic or Latino	18.6%	203,886	1,096,323
Middle Eastern	1.4%	15,030	1,096,323
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.1%	1,602	1,096,323
White	54.3%	595,165	1,096,323
Two or more races	4.4%	48,349	1,096,323
Other or unknown	1.9%	21,310	1,096,323
Gender			
Female	55.5%	604,587	1,088,719
Male	41.4%	450,384	1,088,719
Other or self-described	3.1%	33,820	1,088,719
Age Range			
15-19	3.1%	31,943	1,040,463
20-29	91.3%	950,461	1,040,463
30-39	3.7%	38,578	1,040,463
40-49	1.2%	12,873	1,040,463
50-59	0.5%	5,210	1,040,463
60-69	0.1%	1,160	1,040,463
70-79	0.0%	240	1,040,463
Full-Time or Part-Time Status			
Full-time	95.4%	1,041,388	1,091,824
Part-time	4.6%	50,437	1,091,824
Parent Status			
Yes	5.4%	59,328	1,094,490
First-Generation Status			
Yes	31.4%	343,298	1,093,511

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Pell Grant Status			
Yes	40.5%	439,714	1,084,886
First-Generation and Pell Grant Status			
Yes	22.1%	220,284	996,467
Fields of Study			
Liberal Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences	24.6%	270,036	1,096,323
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)	28.5%	312,117	1,096,323
Health and Clinical	10.3%	113,108	1,096,323
Business and Professional Fields	20.2%	221,580	1,096,323
Education and Human Services	6.3%	69,224	1,096,323
Trades, Technical, and Applied Fields	6.0%	65,465	1,096,323
Arts and Creative Fields	2.6%	28,497	1,096,323
Other or Nontraditional Fields	1.5%	16,296	1,096,323
Institutional Setting			
Metropolitan	84.3%	924,241	1,096,323
Non-metropolitan	15.7%	172,082	1,096,323
Transfer Status			
Yes, transfer from a two-year institution	18.2%	199,187	1,091,985
Yes, transfer from a four-year institution	9.7%	106,467	1,091,985
Residency			
In-state student	76.6%	837,275	1,093,080
Out-of-state student	19.6%	213,793	1,093,080
International student	3.8%	42,012	1,093,080
Course Delivery			
I attended all classes in-person	42.3%	462,666	1,093,283
I attended all classes online	9.3%	101,917	1,093,283
I attended some classes online and some in-person	48.4%	528,700	1,093,283
Affordability			
Extremely affordable	8.9%	97,571	1,090,854
Very affordable	18.9%	206,193	1,090,854
Somewhat affordable	45.8%	499,571	1,090,854
Not very affordable	20.0%	218,336	1,090,854
Not at all affordable	6.3%	69,182	1,090,854
Affordability Affected Education			
Yes	40.4%	439,774	1,089,615

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)			
Yes	10.5%	113,263	1,083,744
Gap Year			
No, I have been enrolled continuously since I started school	89.0%	968,499	1,087,723
Yes, I have paused taking courses for at least half a year during my time at school	11.0%	119,224	1,087,723
Personalized Coaching			
Yes	33.7%	368,429	1,092,848
Types of Personalized Coaching Received			
Advisors	69.4%	255,498	367,962
Faculty	51.7%	190,367	367,969
School website	20.9%	77,036	367,969
Non-school website	11.8%	43,505	367,969
Social media	19.2%	70,727	367,969
Friend	47.4%	174,442	367,969
Family	45.9%	169,004	367,969
Employer or coworker	20.5%	75,506	367,969
Community organization	11.8%	43,487	367,969
Other	4.7%	17,180	367,969
Participation in Work-Based Learning Experiences			
Paid internship	36.9%	383,820	1,041,063
Unpaid internship	24.6%	256,376	1,041,063
Micro internship	2.8%	29,196	1,041,063
Apprenticeship	3.3%	34,569	1,041,063
Co-op	3.4%	35,620	1,041,063
Practicum	17.9%	186,246	1,041,063
Project-based	19.9%	207,584	1,041,063
Service learning	11.5%	120,206	1,041,063
Undergraduate research	21.9%	227,970	1,041,063
On-campus job	33.2%	345,513	1,041,063
Off-campus job	41.6%	432,712	1,041,063

Category	Weighted Percentage	Weighted Subtotal	Weighted Total
Types of Work-Based Learning Tasks			
Autonomous work	23.3%	228,914	981,727
High-skill tasks with supervision	39.0%	382,403	981,727
Job shadowing	9.7%	95,001	981,727
Low-skill tasks with supervision	28.1%	275,409	981,727
Education Will Help Achieve my Goals			
Strongly agree	54.9%	600,897	1,095,517
Somewhat agree	32.0%	350,903	1,095,517
Neither agree nor disagree	4.9%	53,518	1,095,517
Somewhat disagree	3.3%	35,783	1,095,517
Strongly disagree	5.0%	54,417	1,095,517
Education Will be Worth the Cost			
Strongly agree	35.0%	382,821	1,095,075
Somewhat agree	37.3%	408,788	1,095,075
Neither agree nor disagree	13.0%	142,367	1,095,075
Somewhat disagree	10.1%	110,119	1,095,075
Strongly disagree	4.7%	50,980	1,095,075
Future Plans			
I am not yet sure what I plan to do after graduating	6.9%	75,393	1,093,240
I have been admitted to a program for additional education	13.0%	141,923	1,093,240
I have plans other than working or additional education	2.1%	23,502	1,093,240
I plan to pursue additional education, but have not yet been admitted	17.0%	186,203	1,093,240
I plan to work, but have not yet secured a position	43.6%	476,385	1,093,240
I have accepted a job	17.4%	189,835	1,093,240