Noncredit to Credit: The Data, The Necessity

By Julie Coates, Senior Vice President, LERN

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"Information That Works!"

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Workforce Development & Continuing Education's Generation of Credit Students and Financial Contributions to the Community College

Several studies over the past 20 years have determined that a minimum of 5% of noncredit students in workforce development & continuing education units later enroll as a credit student within just 4 years at the same community college.

LERN's Contribution

In addition, colleges that are LERN members experience a 10% increase in noncredit registrations and income, which also generates more credit students for the college. On average, LERN generates more than $100,000 a year to each college in noncredit income and credit student income.

The Necessity

1. Count the contribution

Despite the numerous studies, few if any CFOs or central administrators measure and 'count' the financial contribution. This is self-defeating for the college, and leads to bad decisions that hurt the college and the community.

For example, a c.e. unit could be losing $100,000 in its noncredit operations, but contributing $1.0 million dollars in credit students, and everyone would say that c.e. unit is losing money.

For the good of the college, particularly in the current environment of declining and inadequate 2 year and 4 year college graduates, colleges must now measure and count the workforce development & continuing education generation of credit students and credit financial contribution to the college.

Welcome

As Co-Chair of the LERN Board of Directors, I am pleased and excited to present this new and critical research report to you.

Now more than ever, it is both necessary and beneficial to measure and enhance the financial contribution that workforce development and continuing education contributes to our community colleges.

Workforce development and continuing education in community colleges convert thousands of noncredit students to credit and degree students at our institutions. The financial contribution of these new credit students is in the millions of dollars.

The Learning Resources Network (LERN) is the leading national association, and consulting group, in workforce development and continuing education for community colleges.

I have known and worked with Julie Coates for several decades. She is one of the foremost researchers in education today.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue, which can have so many positive beneficial effects for your college.

-Perry Harker, Vice President, Corporate & Community Education, Carteret Community College, Morehead, North Carolina

2. Maximize brochure distribution

Some 30% of community colleges have eliminated the print brochure for their c.e. unit. Other colleges have cut back the number of print brochures distributed. This has had the effect of reducing the number of credit students that the c.e. unit generates.

We now have the numbers and dollars involved to help c.e. units determine the optimum number of brochures to print and distribute to maximize c.e. noncredit income and credit income for the college.

3. Measure other c.e. financial contributions

We now have evidence that workforce development & continuing education units make additional financial contributions to the college. These include:

Votes

For referendums at the local level, studies show participants in c.e. vote 20 points higher in favor of tax payer funding of the college than the average voter.

Alumni donations

The first study of c.e. participants donating to the college alumni or advancement foundation found that 14% of c.e. participants donated to the college, as compared with the national average of 8% of community college alumni, adding millions of dollars for the college.

Kids College

The data shows that children attending the college's Summer Camps or Kids College program later enroll as a credit student in significant numbers.

College Employee Retention

We are exploring with college continuing educators to measure the positive effect on retention when a non-faculty employee of the college attends c.e. classes. Turnover is the highest in postsecondary education since 1971, according to CUPA HR. And Coates found that the average cost of leaving a clerical worker is 75% of the person's annual salary, while replacing a director level person costs the college 100% of the person's salary.

The Data

The studies done all reconfirm the minimum of 5%.

IPEDS Reporting

"Noncredit offerings play an important but understudied role in higher education," writes Mason Erwin.(Page ii) "Furthermore, the exclusion of noncredit enrollment from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) negatively affects the quality of IPEDS data, specifically the calculation of per FTE student ratios…" (Page iii) Erwin, M. (2020). Noncredit Enrollment and Related Activities. (NPEC 2019). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. But there are several different studies done by several different institutions and entities, the results of which are very consistent. So nationally, there is not good data at present. But there clearly is a stated need and benefit for national data, according to the study for IPEDS and published by NCES.

New York University

The first research on the percentage of noncredit students later enrolling as a credit student in the same institution was reported by the legendary c.e. marketer Dorothy Durkin of New York University, the nation's largest continuing education unit with income of over $100 million dollars a year.

She told LERN that 6% of her noncredit students later enrolled as a credit student at NYU, saying, "For this reason alone, NYU would never eliminate its continuing education unit."

University of Michigan Studies

A team of researchers, led by Dr. Peter Riley Bahr of the University of Michigan, has documented the noncredit to credit percentage for community colleges in three states.

The numbers are the percentage of non-credit students who first took a noncredit c.e.. course and later took a credit course at the same community college within 2 years.

Indiana 4%
Iowa 5%
Texas 5%

In addition, Bahr and colleagues found another 2% of noncredit students took credit classes concurrently with their noncredit studies.

See the 2024 report here: https://www.edpolicyresearch.org/noncredit

Virginia Community College Study

A study for the Virgina Community College System in 2017 found that 7.2% of noncredit students transitioned into credit courses within 6 years.

See "Blending Credit & Non-Credit Courses" in *Inquiry: The Journal of the Virginia Community Colleges,* Vol. 22, Issue 1, Article 6.

LERN Studies

No community college has reported fewer than 5% of its noncredit c.e. students later enrolling as a credit student.

At the 5% minimum. there is no urging or recruitment to enroll a noncredit student as a credit student. It just happens, without even one email. The range is 5% to 13%. At the higher percentages there is intentional pathways and other c.e. initiatives to achieve a higher percentage.

REPORT IMPLICATIONS

This report has two major implications.

(1) Colleges should measure and 'count' noncredit workforce development and continuing education credit and degree students, as well as the additional financial contributions.

(2) Brochure distribution needs to balance cost cutting with maximizing income for the college, particularly credit and student enrollment and the funding each credit student brings to your college.

Report Researcher

Julie Coates is a leading researcher on learner demographics and learning styles in North America.

Author of the classic work, *Generational Learning Styles*.

Interviewed by the BBC, New York Times, Washington Post, Psychology Today, and other national media.

Keynote speaker at Radcliffe, College Board PBS; and in Germany, United Kingdom, Australia, Mexico, and throughout Canada and the United States.

Adjunct professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of South Dakota.

Pioneering Research

Revealed in these books.
*\ *Invisible Diversity*, 2018
*\ *The Pedagogy of the 21st Century*, co-author, 2014
*\ *Generational Learning Styles*, 2007
*\ *Smart Boys, Bad Grades: Gender Discrimination and STEM in Education*, co-author, 2015
*\ *Nine Shift: Work, life and education in the 21st century*, co-author, 2000.

Formative Years

Julia Taylor was born in Appalachia, of Melungeon descent, and grew up in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Her rural, poor and extended family support system was instrumental in forming her world outlook. Her father, a military hero who was injured in the bombing at Pearl Harbor, was a teacher, farmed, was a chemist and later headed up the migrant education program for the state.

She attended the first integrated high school in Raleigh, attended the University of North Carolina Greensboro, and then dropped out to become a civil rights leader in Greensboro. Julie organized 300 tutors for the children in the projects, led protests and sit-ins to break down segregation, and created the first Black Beauty Pageant in the city, maybe state, maybe nation.




Julie Coates has lived in three economic and education ages: The Agrarian Age; The Industrial Age; and now The Knowledge Society.

The Klu Klux Klan and the two North Carolina Grand Dragons tried to kill her several times. A KKK mob of one hundred surrounded her house, prompting around the clock armed police protection. She was subject to cross burnings, police harassment, and constant KKK threats.

She was called “one of heroines” by a fair housing attorney.

Afterward, she went into remote mountain areas to urge parents to send their children to school in a program that was the forerunner to the Volunteers In Service to America (VISTA), a domestic Peace Corps.

After attending Cornell University, she graduated from North Carolina State University and later received her Masters in Adult Education at Kansas State University.

In Kansas, she directed the local University for Man (UFM), an innovative program of no-cost community education classes for the community under the auspices of Kansas State University. In the 1970s she set up child care, edible green house gardens, housed a suicide hotline, initiated the state’s first Folk Arts position, and garnered grants from FIPSE.

It was there she created the essential ratios for continuing education, authoring “Enrollment Analysis,” “Course Trends” and manually conducted the first carrier route analysis of participants.

Recent Work

As Senior Vice President at LERN, Ms. Coates gained national recognition and media attention for her breakthrough research on generational learning styles, gender learning styles, autistic students, and neurodiversity. The BBC’s Global Business reporter Peter Day flew from China to her home to interview her for a half-hour radio program that aired worldwide.

In 2000 she and her co-author predicted the rise in online learning, working remotely, and the growth of passenger trains, among their nine shifts.

In 2023 she became the first person in North America to conduct a session and findings that Gen Z has a different management style that she predicted will become the model for management in business and organizations for the 21st century.

Julie Coates, Senior Vice President, LERN, is the primary researcher for the report “Noncredit to Credit: The Data, The Necessity.”

About LERN

The Learning Resources Network (LERN) is the leading association and consulting organization for workforce development and continuing education in community colleges.

ROI

LERN boosts by 10% your noncredit registrations and income. Three different studies prove that LERN member organizations have 10% higher noncredit registrations and income than non-member organizations. No other entity has the same effect.

- As a result, LERN also boosts your credit and degree students, increases alumni giving, enhances tax payer support, providing the average college with over $100,000 additional income every year. That overall financial contributions to your college is, of course, matched by maximizing the economic prosperity and quality of life in your communities and district.

- Nationally, there are 100,000 new learners a year taking classes who would not otherwise be served by our member educational institutions. And LERN generates 10,000 new credit and degree students every year for our members.

UNIQUE: WHAT LERN DOES

LERN serves as the Research & Development (R&D) arm of the workforce development and continuing education field in community colleges.

From the top performing units in workforce development and continuing education, LERN researches best practices and creates benchmarks and recommendations for the field.

We stay current with advances and changes. We survey our colleges regularly. Unique to LERN is our professional consulting staff's decades of experience in analyzing data, measuring innovations, and identifying emerging trends.

FOUNDATIONS

LERN is a 501.c.3 tax-exempt educational organization, just like our members. Founded in 1974, LERN is run by a Board of Directors from member organizations.

We are also served by leaders in our Community College Council for 5 or fewer FTE staff; and by our Community College Council for 6 or more FTE staff. The Contract Training advisory group leads the annual contract training conference.

LERN leaders set directions and goals; LERN staff carrying out and execute the activities and services.

In 1998, LERN transitioned from a single headquarters office to become virtual; allowing us to recruit the best people nationwide for key positions. Today, four professional continuing educators manage the organization, with a competent administrative staff of six.

LERN THE ASSOCIATION

As an association, LERN members provide a continual stream of data:
-Registrations;
-Course trends;
-Marketing results;
-Social media patterns;
-Needs assessments;
-New program initiatives;
-Staffing structure;
-Centralizing Operations;
-Financial data.

Individual program financial and registration data are confidential; only averages and success stories are published.

From our North American reach, we also tap our members' experiences and observations to give us a statistically significant base from which to report trends and make recommendations.

LERN LEADERS

A few of the LERN Leaders for 2025-2026 include:
-Perry Harker, Carteret Community College, Morehead, NC; Co-Chair of the Board.
-Scott Cashman, Harper College, Palatine, IL.
-Elisa Waldman, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, KS.
-Betty Sedor, El Camino College, Torrance, CA.
-Adrian Lipsett, Vancouver Community College, Vancouver, BC, Canada
-Tawana Flood, Bermuda College, Bermuda
-Gary Girard, Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, NE
-Jo Ann Hall, Moraine Park Technical College, Fond du Lac, WI
-Amy Lasack, Northeast Iowa Community College, Dubuque, IA
-Lauren Holland, Midlands Technical College, Columbia, SC
-Aaron Sauerbrei, Hawkeye Community College, Waterloo, IA
-Brenda Marshall, Community College of Baltimore County, Catonsville, MD

LERN THE CONSULTING GROUP

The association function of LERN is linked to the consulting and training function of LERN. The four professional continuing educators form the largest and most experienced consulting group in workforce development and continuing education.

Every consulting project provides a 10:1 ROI for our customers, the largest segment of which is community and technical colleges.

- Certified Program Planner (CPP) designation is the leading designation for the field of workforce development and continuing education. Vice President Brendan Marsello is our lead trainer, delivering training both on-site and online.

- The LERN Program Review is the most comprehensive, intensive consulting we do, spending two to three months working with the college, gathering data, and presenting both a written and verbal report at the end.

ABOUT OUR CONSULTANTS

All of our consultants have previously worked at the local level with one or more continuing education organizations. All of us write, speak, teach, and consult. Each of the four consultants has both a command of the advanced how-to practical knowledge; and in addition has one or more areas of subspecialty in which she or he has exceptional skills.

The team has two veterans with decades of experience in the field; and two Gen Y professionals in tune with social media, technology and forming the core leadership for the next 50 years.
-Dr. Travette Webster, CPP, Vice President for Communication and Diversity, and Chief Operating Officer, Houston, Texas.
-Brendan Marsello, CPP, Vice President for Development, Jackson, New Hampshire.
-Julie Coates, CPP, Senior Vice President, Portland, Oregon.
-William A. Draves, CAE, CPP, President, Presque Isle, Wisconsin.

SERVICES

1.Free Webinars
2.Print Newsletters
3.Monthly Email Newsletter
4.Dashboard Analysis
5.Virtual Gatherings
6.Interest Groups
7.Survey Data
8.Benchmark Recommendations
9.Leadership and Presentation Opportunities
10.Member Discounts
At least six individuals with your program are eligible to receive benefits.

PREMIER MEMBERS

Premier Members receive, in addition to Essential Member benefits:
A. Annual Conference for up to 30 staff
B. Website Critique priority
C. Print Brochure Critique priority
D. Unique customized software and analysis of brochure distribution and registrations by carrier route, for U.S. Premier Members. We cut an average of 20% off brochure and brochure distribution costs without losing (and often gaining) registrations and income.

ACHIEVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

-The LERN Financial Format.
Now the most recognized and used financial reporting format by best programs in the field.

-Saved the Print Brochure.
A ten year effort to maintain the most important marketing avenue, generating around 70% of all noncredit registrations.

-The 8 Stage Needs Assessment Model.
A model and process for market research into big new growth areas and audiences.

-Gen Z Management Style.
Gen Z may have the best management style for the workplace of the 21st Century.

-Brochure Annual Trends.
Critiquing hundreds of brochures every year, and with the largest brochure collection in the world for lifelong learning programs, we annually report the latest trends.

-Carrier Route Analysis.
Unique software, combined with expert analysis, cuts promotion costs 20% and maximizes income.

-LERN Dashboard.
The most extensive collection and benchmarks of the most important key data for the field, updated annually.

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