

Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee

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Higher Education Certificate Programs

STUDY SCOPE

Focus

This study will examine the effectiveness of postsecondary certificate programs in meeting workforce demands offered in four settings: 1) community-technical colleges; 2) Connecticut State University System; 3) Charter Oak State College; and 4) private occupational schools. A description of various certificate programs will be developed and alignment of relevant supply (i.e., certificate holders) and demand (job openings requiring the certificate) will be analyzed. The study will also compare Connecticut's certificate completion rate to that of other states and examine reasons for any differences.

Background

While the positive relationship between academic degrees and employment outlook has been well documented, in recent years there has been acknowledgement that sub-baccalaureate educational certificates, alternative educational credentials, also have value. A federal work group defined educational certificates as “a credential awarded by a training provider or educational institution based on completion of all requirements for a program of study, including coursework and test or other performance evaluations.”¹ Research has shown certificate holders tend to earn more than people with some college but no degree.² Certificates can fulfill specific employer needs and position certificate completers for careers with increased earnings.³

Sub-baccalaureate certificates have been further divided into three categories based on the length of the program: less than one academic year (short-term); at least one but less than two academic years (mid-term); and at least two but less than four academic years (long-term). Some research has shown long-term certificates to have significantly higher labor market value than short-term certificates.⁴

According to some reports, Connecticut lags behind the national average in awarding sub-baccalaureate certificates. For example, the interim report of the Strategic Master Plan for

¹ 2009 Federal Interagency Working Group on Expanded Measures of Enrollment and Attainment. <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/gemena/>

² “Measuring Alternative Educational Credentials: 2012” by Stephanie Ewert and Robert Kominski, Issued January 2014, United States Census Bureau.

³ “Certificates Count: An Analysis of Sub-baccalaureate Certificates.” December 2010, Complete College America, Washington, DC.

⁴ The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) divides certificates into these three groups which is why this methodology is used to classify programs.

Connecticut Postsecondary Education shows that the state ranks 40th in the nation for percent of adults with certificates.

Areas of Analysis

1. Examine reasons for the relatively lower production of sub-baccalaureate certificates compared to the national average
2. Develop an inventory of sub-baccalaureate educational certificate programs offered in Connecticut through:
 - a. Regional community-technical colleges
 - b. Connecticut State University System
 - c. Charter Oak State College
 - d. Private occupational schools
3. Compare and analyze for-credit and non-credit certificate programs in terms of:
 - a. Types and number offered (including those limited to employees of a specific company)
 - b. Tuition and fees
 - c. Length of program
 - d. Availability of academic credit for courses completed as part of the certificate program
 - e. Completion and dropout rates and possible reasons for any high dropout rates
 - f. The number of certificate programs that lead to an industry certification
4. Identify the barriers to enrollment and completion of certificate programs including:
 - a. Awareness
 - b. Affordability
 - c. Accessibility
5. Assess the alignment of supply and demand for certain certificate programs
 - a. Evaluate supply of certificate program completers
 - b. Assess market demand for jobs requiring certain certificates
 - Employment placement rates
 - Relevancy of job to student's certificate program area
 - Earnings before and after certificate completion (if available)
 - c. Find areas where there is alignment and misalignment of supply and demand
6. Identify any best practices for the development and operation of certificate programs

Study Limitations and Areas Not Under Review

This study will exclude any sub-baccalaureate programs outside the four settings identified under the first area of analysis (e.g., excludes University of Connecticut, Technical High Schools). This study will further limit the identification of educational certificate programs to those meeting the formal definition provided in the background section. Certificates of attendance or participation in a short-term training will not be included. Data availability and accessibility may limit the ability to complete all areas of analysis.

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