

2021 Update on the Non-Degree Credentials Research Network (NCRN)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the NCRN's activities over the past year. Despite the ongoing pandemic that has prevented us from safely hosting in-person meetings, we have progressed with our work through a monthly webinar series, stepped-up communications (report-writing, blogging and improving our website), and collaborating on research efforts with others. A major aim of this work is to synthesize and summarize research findings for a broader audience, including a newsletter co-published with the Program on Skills, Credentials & Workforce Policy at George Washington University — *Workforce Monitor*.

A significant accomplishment of the NCRN to date has been publication of *New Directions for Non-Degree Credentialing Research*. This report describes key unanswered research questions for the field of non-degree credentials and identifies barriers to conducting such research. In so doing, the report emphasizes the need for more and better federal data collection on non-degree credentials through existing and planned surveys, including the National Training, Education, and Workforce Survey (NTEWS). It also emphasizes the need for the research community to explore the potential of administrative data sources, as well as privately-held datasets such as those owned by Burning Glass, LinkedIn, and PayScale. Data is needed at a sufficient level of geographic detail to be able to explore regional and local patterns of credential attainment and value, and there is also a great need for longitudinal data sources that allow for the tracking of labor market outcomes in the months and years following credential attainment.

Proposals to resurrect the Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Survey of Employer-Provided Training* are especially pertinent to this work, and members of the NCRN appreciate efforts being made to relaunch this survey. NCRN members are also interested in efforts underway to explore the addition of data on non-credit attainment to the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

A second significant area of effort has been NCRN's international outreach. Here we have emphasized understanding how the U.S. compares to other world regions in the adoption of non-degree credentials (often referred to as "microcredentials" in Europe and elsewhere) and U.S. efforts to study the attainment and value of non-degree credentials. To this end, we are actively proposing an international "network of research networks" to the National Science Foundation to study skills, non-degree credentials, and the relationship between non-degree credentials and how we can better synchronize definitions of non-degree credentials across national borders and in official data systems. We plan to submit this proposal to the NSF in October 2021 and pursue opportunities to connect with international colleagues in the meantime (continuing the significant outreach we began in fall 2020 to researchers in Australia, Asia, Europe, Canada, and the OECD). We have learned that UNESCO is convening an international task force to establish a common definition of the term "microcredentials" and the U.S. has been largely absent from such meetings. This adds to our concern that U.S. labor market information sources could become increasingly detached from those in use in the rest of the world.

We warmly welcome WIAC members' involvement in the NCRN. In addition to participating in our webinars, we welcome announcements about new sources of data, opportunities to comment on data collections, and opportunities to participate in collaborative research efforts. We also welcome announcements of conferences and publishing opportunities. Interested individuals may join our updates listserv by sending "SUB NCRN-PUBLIC" in the body of an email message (with no subject line or other text) to LISTSERV@hermes.gwu.edu.