



# NON-CREDIT PROGRAMS AT GREAT BAY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A Case Study

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## Overview

Great Bay Community College (GBCC) represents a dynamic academic institution with a rich history of transformation and expansion. As a two-year, public, open-access college, GBCC offers a diverse spectrum of educational opportunities, including associate degrees, certificates, and non-credit training programs. It holds a significant position within the Community College System of New Hampshire (CCSNH), which comprises seven colleges dedicated to serving students pursuing career prospects, degree programs, transfer options, and non-credit program initiatives in Rockingham and Strafford Counties.

GBCC's journey began with its initial accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) in 1975. Since that time, the institution has undergone an evolution, transitioning from a vocational school into a comprehensive community college, and subsequently reaccredited by the New England Commission on Higher Education (NECHE) in 2018.

The college offers an extensive range of academic offerings, having sixty-three associate degree and certificate programs. As of Fall 2022, enrollment statistics reveal a total credit headcount of 2,917 students carrying 17,331 credits. The student demographics comprise 52.82% females, 44.51% males, and a racial composition in which 78.64% identify as White. In terms of age distribution, 59.67% of students fall within the range of twenty or younger, while 18.64% are aged thirty or older, with 86.04% attending part-time.

GBCC has a strong commitment to facilitating transfer opportunities for its students, with the majority choosing to continue their education at the nearby University of New Hampshire, which is located ten miles from the GBCC Portsmouth campus. Furthermore, GBCC houses a robust Business and Training Center (BTC) which actively engages in system-wide initiatives



aimed at the development of micro-credentials, digital credentials, and participation in statewide economic development endeavors. In the lead-up to the formulation of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, the college conducted an inventory that revealed over 328 unique external partners actively collaborating with various departments and programs across the institution.

### **Mission and Purpose**

Non-credit programming at GBCC finds its institutional home in the Business and Training Center (BTC). The BTC operates as a distinct department within the college, with a clear and defined mission—to bolster workforce capacity and foster economic growth in the Seacoast region by offering non-credit short-term programs. The BTC's portfolio comprises three core categories: open enrollment, customized training, and apprenticeship programs.

GBCC's open enrollment programs are designed to cater to a broad spectrum of individuals, including those in pursuit of new career opportunities, those aiming to enhance their existing skills for career advancement, and individuals who are new to the job market. Notably, these offerings extend beyond individual development and support small companies in their effort to provide cost-effective training for their employees. For larger organizations with multiple employees in need of training, the BTC offers customized training solutions that can be delivered on-site at the company or on the college's campus.

The manufacturing industry stands as a focal point of GBCC's offerings, encompassing programs and courses in shop math, blueprint reading, manufacturing fundamentals, LEAN principles, and business processes. Against the backdrop of an unemployment rate consistently below 3% for much of 2022, GBCC recognizes the growing importance of employee retention and the provision of employee training as an attractive benefit. This is particularly true in the healthcare sector, where GBCC collaborates with local medical offices to deliver Medical



Assistant (MA) training programs. Notably, these programs achieve high levels of success, with 30-40 MAs graduating annually, most of whom secure employment prior to program completion. In 2022, GBCC extended its commitment to workforce development by partnering with Manchester Community College, to offer a Licensed Nursing Assistant (LNA) program. The goal is to graduate 30 LNAs annually, further enhancing the institution's contributions to the healthcare sector on the Seacoast.

Additionally, apprenticeships have emerged as a significant component of the BTC's initiatives. The CCSNH secured grants from the US Department of Labor in 2019 to establish and expand apprenticeships across the state. GBCC currently provides related instruction for two manufacturing apprenticeships and recently concluded an apprenticeship program in collaboration with Exeter Hospital, focusing on LNA training. In the summer of 2022, CCSNH received a substantial \$5.8 million grant from the Department of Labor (DOL) to extend apprenticeships through a hub model. This expansion aims to further develop apprenticeships in critical sectors such as manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, and construction.

Collectively, these programs align seamlessly with GBCC's overarching mission, which emphasizes the expansion of intellectual and economic opportunities through the provision of affordable higher education within an environment characterized by excellence, innovation, and collaboration.<sup>1</sup>

## **Planning and Evaluation**

GBCC's approach to program development and delivery is underpinned by a strong commitment to addressing the real-time needs of the workforce. An illustration of this responsive

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.greatbay.edu/about/vision-mission-core-values/>



approach is the Medical Assistant (MA) Program. This program emerged as a response to a request from Exeter Health Resources (EHR), which faced a pressing workforce shortage. EHR could not afford to wait for individuals to complete associate degrees before filling critical positions. In close collaboration, GBCC and EHR crafted a 12-week intensive program that incorporated all the essential outcomes needed to prepare students for their roles. Graduates emerge from this program highly qualified, ready to undertake certification exams, and seamlessly integrate into the workforce.

While the MA program operates on a quarterly basis, GBCC's non-credit open enrollment programs and courses adhere to a schedule aligned with traditional academic semesters, with offerings three times a year. Leveraging limited marketing resources, GBCC utilizes marketing efforts associated with credit-bearing programs to enhance the visibility and accessibility of non-credit courses and programs. Looking ahead, as the college intensifies its focus on non-credit programming, this strategy will undergo a comprehensive review to assess whether adjustments in program cycles and targeted marketing are warranted.

GBCC places a premium on industry engagement and regularly receives input from local businesses and industry representatives. Proposed courses and programs often align with regional and national employment data and are subject to rigorous evaluation to ensure that they meet community expectations and remain affordable.

For workshops and other short-term training, informal assessments are conducted, including in-class quizzes and participant presentations. Participants in all programs and courses are encouraged to complete online evaluations that encompass content, delivery, and scheduling. Cumulative results are sent to relevant stakeholders, including the client in the case of corporate training, the instructor, and the BTC director. The process for any program modifications



remains within the purview of the department. Feedback is generally centered around scheduling preferences and delivery modes, with participants occasionally expressing a preference for alternative training times or online vs. in-person options.

In the realm of corporate training, customer satisfaction serves as the primary measure of program effectiveness. Evidence of this is demonstrated in client loyalty, as many companies return for additional training, whether it's to onboard new employees in existing programs or provide existing employees with training in new subject areas. GBCC exercises due diligence in budgeting, with the chief business officer and BTC staff jointly responsible for developing forecasts and scrutinizing financial P/L evaluations. In response to evolving needs and changing dynamics, GBCC places increased emphasis on data collection to inform program planning and improvement. An example of this commitment is evident in the involvement of the BTC director in co-chairing a team responsible for establishing internal and external partnership goals as part of the college's strategic planning efforts in 2023.<sup>2</sup>

### **Organization and Governance**

GBCC's non-credit programs are overseen by a dedicated office comprising a director, allied health program manager, and administrative support professional. The director reports to the president, who attends the weekly BTC meetings and meets regularly with the director. The department also shares 25% of an additional healthcare coordinator, with two sister colleges to support the LNA program and the expansion of other potential allied health programs. The college president and system chancellor have been in their roles for 1 ½ and three years,

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<sup>2</sup> From the GBCC strategic plan: STRATEGIC GOAL 3: CULTIVATE COMMUNITY As an integral part of the New Hampshire Seacoast, Great Bay Community College will create and sustain mutually beneficial relationships among students, faculty, staff, and community partners that fortify the educational and workforce capacity throughout the state.



respectively. Both see the necessity of strengthening the workforce development departments and take the lead advocating for non-credit programs with policy makers in the state.

In 2023, non-credit programs, along with micro-credentials, have been solidified as viable educational offerings within the CCSNH academic policy framework, leveraging the UNESCO definition as a reference point.<sup>3</sup> This recognition of short-term, skill-based training as a valuable alternative to traditional degree programs marks a notable shift within the college. To drive this evolution, GBCC established a committee in 2023, comprising the BTC director, interim regional vice president of student success and enrollment management, and five academic department chairs. Their mandate is to explore the delivery of micro-credentials that are stackable within certificate and degree programs. While some micro-credentials may encompass credit-bearing courses, the overarching vision regards them as instrumental in workforce development, bridging non-credit and credit-based programming. This holistic approach will require enhanced data collection to inform non-credit program decision-making. Collaboratively, these initiatives resonate at the System level, with workforce development directors from the seven colleges meeting monthly and championing shared objectives. This includes the development of an enrollment dashboard, aligned Banner coding, and standardized program naming conventions statewide.

GBCC also aligns with the CCSNH to streamline offerings and establish greater collaboration across the seven workforce offices. One notable example of this alignment includes the New Hampshire Employment Security's WorkInvest grant program, which offers a 50% reimbursement to employers for employee training. The workforce offices not only inform employers about the program but actively support the grant application process. In addition, the

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<sup>3</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384326/PDF/384326eng.pdf.multi>



BTC collaborates with the NH Employment Services (NHES) dislocated worker program, raising awareness of funding through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and ensuring expeditious processing of WIOA applications.

### **Academic Program**

The director of workforce development holds an oversight role for all non-credit programs, collaborating closely with the program managers within the BTC. GBCC's BTC serves as a versatile training hub, accommodating on-campus, on-site, and partner location-based programs. Noteworthy examples include one-week training sessions conducted at Spaulding High School's automotive lab during the school's winter and spring breaks. The college's commitment to community collaboration is further exemplified by the launch of a Home Health Aide Apprenticeship course, which was developed within two months, in partnership with the NH Apprenticeship team and Senior Helpers. Easter Seals played a pivotal role in student recruitment, while WIOA expedited the approval process. GBCC provided an experienced instructor, responsible for curriculum design and course delivery. This rapid response underscored the pivotal role of agency partners in facilitating seamless program development. Customized corporate programs form an integral component of GBCC's offerings, with flexibility and employer collaboration at the forefront. BTC staff collaborates directly with instructors and employers to tailor course content, assessments, scheduling, and delivery methods to meet the specific needs of each company. Although variations of the same course may be offered to multiple employers, GBCC's approach prioritizes customization to cater to the unique requirements of individual companies. The curriculum in these cases is more condensed and focused, aligning closely with real-world knowledge and industry-specific activities. GBCC actively explores pathways to credit-bearing programs and recognizes their potential value. The





college's long-standing partnership with the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard's apprenticeship program has been particularly successful. Participants in this program can subsequently pursue an associate degree in Technical Studies, representing a model of successful academic progression. This outcome has spurred GBCC to explore the standardization of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) processes for other manufacturing apprenticeship programs. This initiative has gained momentum as employers recognize the value of their employees attaining additional credentials.

The impact of the pandemic on open enrollment courses has been pronounced, with a few exceptions. Notably, courses in Microsoft Office have experienced sustained demand. Responding to the changing landscape, GBCC began offering these courses online, leading to a collaboration with a sister college aimed at expanding outreach and maximizing enrollment. The BTC also introduced non-credit courses with scaffolded learning outcomes, although student interest beyond introductory courses has been limited. The college has also forged partnerships with third-party vendors such as ED2Go and Upright Education, offering self-paced online training. BTC staff selects these vendors, monitors enrollment, and tracks completion rates. These programs are listed on the website and draw four to five enrollments per month.

The Rochester Campus, formerly known as the Advanced Technology and Academic Center (ATAC), represents a notable success story in institutional adaptation. Originally established to meet the demand for advanced manufacturing certificate programs, the campus has expanded its offerings. In addition to its traditional offerings in Nondestructive Testing (NDT) and Computer Numeric Control (CNC) certificate programs, the campus now includes a welding technologies lab and an expanded visual arts program. The campus plays a pivotal role in coordinating the Motorcycle Maintenance and Repair, and Automotive Technology certificate



programs, even as these classes are delivered off-site. Furthermore, the campus functions as the hub for non-credit programming related to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

## **Students**

Up until 2023, non-credit students were not provided with the student services accessible to their counterparts enrolled in credit-bearing courses. Students in credit-bearing courses incur a \$25 per credit comprehensive fee, which grants them access to a range of services, including a college ID, tutoring, library services, fitness center usage, and technological resources. However, non-credit students have not been subject to this fee. This distinction may not pose an issue for one-day workshops; however, it has become evident that students in more extended programs, such as the Medical Assistant program, could benefit significantly from the student ID and the associated services, particularly tutoring.

All students enrolled in non-credit programs are registered within Banner, the institution's learning management system (LMS). This includes apprentices, who are categorized accordingly. This system enables comprehensive data collection and tracking of students transitioning from non-credit to credit courses. A substantial portion of non-credit students are sponsored by their employers, aiming to enhance their workforce's skills. This includes CCSNH employees, who are granted access to non-credit courses at no cost, subject to availability. Longer-term programs, such as the Medical Assistant program, witness the utilization of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds by many students. The Business and Training Center (BTC) staff diligently seek funding opportunities for applicants, as the majority of these individuals are self-paying students who may not be able to afford the tuition and associated costs.



The College and the BTC are steadfastly aligned with their commitment to the goals of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB), as delineated in the College's most recent strategic plan. In pursuit of this commitment, the Workforce Development Director actively participates as a member of the College's DEIB committee.

### **Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship**

The instructors in the Business and Training Center are primarily contracted personnel. Finding suitable educators for teaching non-credit courses, particularly in the specialized domains of information technology, manufacturing, and other highly technical fields, poses a notable challenge. With the current tight labor market, professionals with these skills often command significantly higher earnings within their respective industries. Another challenge pertains to the demographics of the state, with New Hampshire registering a median age of 41 in 2022, making it the second-oldest state in terms of median age in the United States. Many of the non-credit instructors are in their seventies, and there is a notable absence of successors to fill these roles upon their retirement. In the case of classroom-to-career subjects such as Business, Information Technology, and Manufacturing, full-time faculty members have historically been involved in corporate training, while adjunct faculty members have primarily developed and delivered open enrollment courses. However, this practice is not prevalent. In 2023, full-time faculty members initiated the development of microcredentials derived from the existing course offerings within their respective departments. Moreover, they began the process of reviewing their course schedules to expedite program completion times and increase the frequency of course offerings.

During the instructor selection process, the BTC director assesses resumes posted on the CCSNH job board, collaborating with program managers when necessary. The requirement for a



minimum degree and/or experience is applicable only to licensure programs, although some teaching experience is preferred. In cases where individuals possess extensive industry experience but lack teaching experience, they may shadow an experienced instructor as a co-instructor. Depending on the subject area, word-of-mouth referrals also play a substantial role in the instructor recruitment process. All instructors undergo background checks and reference checks.

### **Institutional Resources**

The College has initiated a review of room scheduling as it relates to the allocation of classrooms, with a particular emphasis on computer labs. Classroom space is prioritized for credit-bearing programs. However, with the increase of online programs, this has alleviated some of those space challenges. Nevertheless, many non-credit instructors exhibit a preference for in-person classes and have displayed reluctance in transitioning to online teaching. With the exception of the Medical Assistant program, instructors have not received training on the Learning Management System (LMS) system, hyflex system, and related technologies. In response, the College is reviewing its IT training guidelines to provide training opportunities for these contracted instructors. To access the LMS, Canvas, students are required to possess a college email address, which may not be feasible for short-term programs and workshops. Consequently, most non-credit programs do not utilize Canvas.

The budgetary process for the BTC aligns with the broader college fiscal year schedule, spanning from July 1 to June 30. The BTC Director collaborates with the college Chief Financial Officer (CFO) to forecast revenue in January. Forecasting corporate training programs proves challenging due to their on-demand nature. Planning for a customized program often occurs in one fiscal year, yet the company may request a schedule delay until the subsequent fiscal year. In



2023, the state legislature allocated \$2 million over two years to be used for short-term non-credit programs across the state. The College is presently formulating a plan to access its share of these funds. Additionally, CCSNH is exploring the utilization of these funds to enhance infrastructure at the system level, aimed at supporting non-credit programs throughout the state, fostering greater collaboration. This initiative may encompass the development of a statewide Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, a workforce coordinator, or a credential repository.

### **Educational Effectiveness**

Learning outcomes for open enrollment programs are collaboratively developed by instructors and BTC staff, frequently serving as marketing tools for course promotion. For instance, promotional flyers for recent courses, such as Supply Chain Planning, have listed learning outcomes. Learning outcomes for customized training programs are formulated in consultation with the employer, the instructor, and BTC staff, tailoring them to meet the specific needs of the employer. In apprenticeships, learning outcomes are prescribed by the United States Department of Labor (DOL) within the work standards and are prioritized by the employer. In the case of a current tool and die maker apprenticeship, GBCC collaborated with the employer to identify competencies that could not be met during on-the-job training and designed a curriculum accordingly. For programs leading to digital badges, learning outcomes are reviewed to ensure they are comprehensible to a broader audience, including employers. All courses within the BTC are graded on a pass/fail basis. Students generally pass if they have attended the class. In the case of open enrollment programs that span multiple sessions, instructors may assign an Administrative Failure grade for non-attendance. For customized programs, the employer plays a role in determining the number of allowable absences.



In the past year, CCSNH initiated a system-wide tracking of non-credit programs, aiming to establish a dashboard that monitors enrollment and program completion across the state. Consequently, GBCC is collaborating with other colleges to standardize course coding in Banner, facilitating statewide comparisons.

Retaining job-related data following program completion has presented challenges. Employers have been reluctant to provide employment information for students who complete programs. However, the Medical Assistant program has been able to collect data related to retention, completion rates, pass rates on certification exams, and job placement rates.

### **Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure**

The institution adheres to a policy of public disclosure for each non-credit course and program, offering information regarding program costs, learning outcomes, and measures of student success. This information is made available through the institution's website and other promotional materials. In cases where applicable, the organization discloses disaggregated data on student success.

Currently, the Medical Assistant program is featured on the website, providing comprehensive information on the Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) exam pass rates, program costs, job prospects, and program details. Open enrollment programs are presented on the website in a downloadable PDF format, offering schedule and cost details. Registration for open enrollment courses is facilitated through a third-party platform, which provides a brief course description. Enrollment data is then manually transferred into Banner. It's important to note that participation in open enrollment classes has witnessed a decline in recent years, with limited measures for assessing student success.



## **Future Plans**

Non-credit programming is intricately woven into the college's 2023-2026 strategic plan. Corporate initiatives will continue to be dictated by market demand, particularly within the healthcare sector. Ongoing funding from CCSNH for apprenticeships will continue, with recent funding amounting to \$2.9 million from the United States Department of Labor. A portion of this funding is dedicated to outreach and employer support, aimed at enhancing access to smaller companies. GBCC is exploring the utilization of training related to federal registered apprenticeships to establish a review process for credit for prior learning. Collaborations are underway with a manufacturing company to enable two of their registered apprenticeships to earn credits towards a Business degree and another two apprenticeships towards a Technical Studies degree.

As enrollment in open enrollment programs continues to dwindle, the College is moving toward developing microcredentials. GBCC is currently piloting these microcredentials using existing credit-bearing courses that can be stacked into certificates and degrees. The future vision involves the development of microcredentials that blend credit courses with non-credit learning opportunities. This blended model will create more pathways for students and better prepare them for workforce demands. These microcredentials will be documented with digital credentials, also known as badges. Such an approach necessitates a more thorough examination and alignment of learning outcomes and skills that address employer needs. The strategic plan sets the timeline for the launch of these pilot microcredentials in spring 2024.

The most significant transformation in non-credit programming will be the intensified collaboration with the seven colleges in the CCSNH System. Plans are underway to align course codes and subject codes system-wide, ensuring more accurate data reporting. This will also



facilitate increased programming collaboration among the seven colleges and greater access to funding from both federal and state sources.