

NECHE Non-Credit Programming Quality Framework

CAMPUS CASE STUDY



NORTHERN ESSEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

September 12, 2023

Institution Overview

Northern Essex Community College (NECC) is a public, two-year college with campuses in Haverhill and Lawrence, MA, that serves the diverse and dynamic communities of Essex County in northeastern Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire. NECC is committed to educating and inspiring its students to succeed in their academic and career goals, offering over 60 associate degree and certificate programs in areas such as health, business, technology, liberal arts, and more. NECC is also a leader in providing innovative and equitable learning opportunities for its students, such as online and hybrid courses, dual enrollment programs, honors courses, and holistic student support services. NECC is proud to be the first Hispanic-serving institution in New England, reflecting its dedication to serving the needs of its diverse student population by closing achievement gaps, increasing student retention and completion rates, and ultimately creating more economic justice in the region.

Mission

At NECC, our mission is to educate and inspire our students to succeed. We provide a welcoming environment focused on teaching and learning—strongly committed to unlocking the potential within each student and empowering our diverse community of learners to meet their individual goals. We are a community college dedicated to creating vibrant and innovative opportunities that encourage excellence and enhance the cultural and economic life of our region.

Vision

It has been said that leadership means the ability to move people from where they are now to where they have never been before, but need to go — and to do so by evoking for them a shared vision for the future.

1. Mission and Purposes

The offering of non-credit programming is encompassed in the institution's mission and purposes. Non-credit programming aligns with an institution's commitment to lifelong learning.

Description and Appraisal:

Non-credit programming aligns with NECC's strategic plan and is featured prominently in both the Community Impact and Academic Innovation goals. Specifically, the following strategies are a focus for non-credit initiatives:

- Develop new degree programs and expand course offerings, ensure that they align with workforce demand, student interest, and community needs
- Review, revise, and create new policies that reduce the barriers to entry for community members to begin their academic or skills training path based on their life experience.

At NECC, Non-credit is comprised of three major sections at the college and is split between two areas.

- i. The Center for Corporate and Community Education (CCCE) includes all personal interest, upskilling, professional development and vocational job training including certificate programs, customized corporate education and contextualized ESOL for industry. This area also focuses on pathways to credit. CCCE is housed within Institutional Advancement along with career services, MassHire MV Career Center, Institutional Effectiveness, MarComm, Grants, Development, and Alumni Relations.

- ii. Adult Basic Education which includes ESOL, GED, HiSET, prison programs, and contextualized ESOL workforce training is housed within the community relations department.

2. Planning and Evaluation

There is regular engagement in program, enrollment, and financial planning for its non-credit courses and programs. The institution balances short- and long-term/strategic planning to ensure it is able to effectively respond to market needs and requests.

The institution has sufficient capacity to systematically collect and use data to support its planning efforts and to enhance its non-credit courses and programs.

As appropriate, industry/employers are involved in the identification and development of non-credit programming. Systematic feedback from employers and other relevant constituencies is a demonstrable factor in the improvement of the programs.

Description and Appraisal:

Non-credit departments at NECC continually engage with corporate and industry partners and stakeholders and evaluate job market data in the area to identify short term and long-term skill needs of local employers and to meet the needs of the local community for vocational job training that will provide access to in demand jobs with sustainable incomes providing a path to economic stability and upward mobility. In addition to the one-to-one evaluation, the college also has a license for Lightcast, a labor market analytics software.

Particular course objectives, outcomes and competencies are captured in curriculum development and learning agendas and shared via syllabi and course descriptions. Outcomes are measured by successful completion of the course work, passing of state licensure exams, and job placement.

At NECC we continue to strive toward a full feedback loop that is regular and measurable. For some of our programs; CNA, Pharmacy Technician and EMT we have established feedback through the ongoing work with employers as part of grant/funding requirements and clinical/hands on experiences. For programs that require licensure – the content is developed based on testing with real time feedback from students and testing services on pass rates and where course content can be improved. Corporate Education programs include an initial identification of goals and outcomes and a debrief at the end of the program for verification. For longer programs, periodic and regular check ins occur with the instructor and client.

Challenges:

Data collection in a meaningful way is a new and developing area of focus, making meaningful comparisons to prior years difficult.

- a. Non-Credit courses are not enrolled in the same system as credit creating a huge customer service issue by not providing a quick access snap shot of all the programs a student has participated in across the college and creating a very analog approach to evaluating success metrics and mapping credit pathways.
- b. Consistent reporting. Unlike the credit side of the house, there has yet to exist a widespread data collection effort like HEIRS, etc. that requires specific data that is pulled consistently across institutions.
- c. A data dictionary and some initial benchmarks will be key.

Additionally, the non-credit side of the house must function as several departments as compared to the credit side of the house. Two obvious needs are a registrar for non-credit as well as an assessment and advising function.

3. **Organization and Governance**

The institution employs staff and faculty sufficient in role, number, and qualifications to support the institution's non-credit programming.

Non-credit programs are integrated into the institution's internal governance structures and provide for the appropriate participation of its staff and faculty.

The institution recognizes and supports the need to develop non-credit programming in a timely manner to respond to industry/employer needs.

There is engagement with and across relevant stakeholder groups including employers and relevant state agencies, as appropriate

Description and Appraisal

CCCE is a team of six people, with a director, a manager and coordinator each for corporate and community education, and a department coordinator. The department staff, enrolls students, fields questions, advises students, handles payments, manages data collection and output of reports across a wide range of reporting requirements.

CCCE works with companies in the following way:

- Creates relationship
- Determines workforce needs
- Creates plan
- Hires instructors - an increasingly difficult thing to do
- Creates curriculum
- Continues relationship

On the community/open enrollment side CCCE:

- Researches and maps out industry and student need

- Oversees the development of curriculum for courses and certificates; course creation, if done correctly, can take several months and for some, more than a year.
- Develops and implement recruitment strategies
- Identifies and sources funding opportunities

CCCE participates on the college compliance committee, the data governance committee, and participates in the Title IX survey.

Non-credit is uniquely positioned to respond quickly to the needs of the community and local industry – utilizing industry experts to create curriculum without the need for academic review and accreditation.

NECC, across all departments, engages with relevant state agencies, local employers and community organizations. There is a concerted effort across academic affairs and career services to present a comprehensive view of NECC and all the relevant touch points to the local business community.

Challenges:

The need for responsiveness begets the need for more people. In a resource strapped institution, it can be difficult to obtain an additional FTE hindering capacity building.

4. Academic Program

Structured processes exist that ensure the design of quality non-credit courses and programs. A relevant set of competencies and learning outcomes are identified for each course that lead to outcomes of value (e.g., employment, job advancement, transfer to credit-bearing

program). Courses are of an appropriate length and level to achieve the established competencies.

The subject matter of non-credit courses and programs is current, relevant, and connects to industry or work force needs

As appropriate, non-credit courses and programs have transfer pathways to credit-bearing programs. The content and learning outcomes of stackable non-credit courses are appropriately scaffolded.

Description and Appraisal:

Non-credit employs a specific process in identifying programs to develop including a full understanding of corporate goals and objectives in initiating employee training. CCCE sources and engages industry experts, consultants and educators to create and deliver curriculum. For programs that require state certification/licensure upon completion the curriculum is specifically designed and approved when applicable to provide students with the skill and knowledge to successfully pass the exam. However, quality, in this context is subjective. The quality of a corporate program is defined and determined by the value placed on the specific outcomes and how well they were attained in the eyes of the corporate client.

The very nature of non-credit programs leave room for variation in topics, depth of curriculum, length of the course and outcomes and competencies needed to achieve personal and corporate goals.

By directly working with a particular corporate client to customize and contextualize for their work environment is 100% current and relevant to their workforce needs. In open enrollment programs for professional development and vocational job training, subject matter is identified based on research and input from a variety of stakeholders. On-going programs

are reviewed for continued relevancy and updating periodically by CCCE staff and instructors.

At NECC, there are articulation agreements for CNA into Healthcare Technician pathway and an agreement for EMT for free elective credit, but not into a specific program. EMT certification upon completion of an EMT program is the prerequisite for the Paramedic pathway. Non-credit and academic affairs have begun a more integrated approach for identifying additional pathways for students into credit bearing programs and providing students with the knowledge of what may be possible. Of note, however, is that transfer pathways to continued education, at least in the short term, is not the outcome and goal of many non-credit students. And there is more work to be done to increase the efficiency and effectiveness in the process for determining and evaluating appropriate skills and competencies and where they can be applied into credit bearing programs.

5. Students

There are effective processes and systems in place for enrolling non-credit students and for issuing credentials/transcripts to students who successfully complete the program of study. The institution maintains a record of course/program completions of its non-credit students

The institution has established goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion as appropriate for its non-credit student populations and is implementing plans to achieve those goals.

There are sufficient learner support systems in place to ensure the success of the institution's non-credit students to include advising, tutoring, and library and technology services.

The institution offers an array of student services appropriate to the needs and goals of its non-credit student. Non-credit students have access to other campus resources, as appropriate, and are considered a part of the campus community.

Description and Appraisal

Non-credit at NECC utilizes the Destiny One product for enrollment, course management and payments. There is ongoing work at the department level in concert with other NECC departments (Institutional Effectiveness, IT) to improve data integration and reporting outputs.

Currently non-credit students are not actively provided with services normally integrated in the for credit academic environment. In service of this goal however, the non-credit CNA program was recently moved into the NECC nursing lab space, affording students access to computers, the nursing student lounge, and providing interaction with other healthcare students and faculty. In lieu of “tutoring” an additional skills review day was added to the curriculum for test prep. In the EMT program, three hours of weekly tutoring hours were built into the curriculum for any student at any time. These are examples of very specific program adaptations to ensure student success, but are not yet part of the overall student support system for non-credit students.

Challenges:

There currently exists little to no student support for Non-credit students at NECC. Additionally, some funding sources for non-credit programs require a different set of support services, including case management, that are not readily available and require third party involvement.

As stated above, non-credit students are often not on campus with training being held off site, some are only part of the community for a short period of time because the programs take less time to complete.

Of note, many of the criteria in the framework seem to be viewed through a credit lens. There are a variety of desired outcomes in these programs as well as a myriad of reasons why people take some of these courses. Especially as it pertains to students, many of these programs are an “as quick as possible” to gain a specific workforce need.

6. Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship

There are sufficient and qualified educators/professionals to develop and teach the non-credit courses and programs.

*The programs are **overseen** by educators with degrees and/or industry experience appropriate to the subject matter.*

The institution’s academic faculty are informed about and supportive of the offering of non-credit programming.

Description and Appraisal:

The instructor pool often comes from “consultants” with their own companies and/or people who have worked in the industry and want to teach or pivot in a career. They are very much part of the gig economy and instructors that work in non-credit for NECC often also work at other Community Colleges or training organizations. Non-credit instructors are not typically required to have a Master’s degree or previous experience in higher education.

The non-credit staff “oversee” lots of programs across a wide range of industries without having direct industry experience. We rely on our external partners and stakeholders, our instructors, curriculum developers and NECC faculty for expertise. Our challenge is to evaluate these outside resources to ensure they are providing the level of expertise required to create and implement successful, valuable programs.

The non-credit team actively builds relationships with credit faculty and staff to increase exposure to our programs, garner support and input as needed.

Challenges:

Sourcing and keeping instructors that meet our standards and are flexible and adaptable to our timelines is an on-going challenge. Many participate in the gig economy and NECC is not their only employer.

7. Institutional Resources

There are sufficient financial resources from tuition, grants, and other sources of funding to carry out its plans to offer quality non-credit programming.

The organization has sufficient human resources, including faculty and staff, to support effective instruction of its non-credit programming, provide needed student services, and evaluate the effectiveness of its offerings

The organization has sufficient physical, information, and technological resources to ensure the quality of its non-credit programming and the success of its students.

Description and Appraisal:

This is constant and on-going activity and concern requiring ever increasing resources. For example – current funding for EMT, CNA, and Pharm Tech programs expire after June 2024 with no guarantee they will be available again. Grant and RFP processes are continuous and resource heavy in all phases - researching, applying, managing, and reporting. If funding is not available and received for these programs, the option to charge tuition through open enrollment will dramatically decrease the number of people who can participate and greatly impact our mission to influence and improve our community by providing workforce ready employees and giving our community pathways to economic stability.

For programs that are self-funded/open enrollment, we focus on efficiency and effectiveness of the training to keep the costs as reasonable and as possible without compromising quality. Financial Aid is not currently available for non-credit classes.

Developing new programming (bio lab/advanced manufacturing/IT/Behavioral health) requires funding sources for research and development.

Challenges:

Balancing and prioritizing resources.

8. Educational Effectiveness

The institution's non-credit courses and programs have clear, measurable learning competencies and/or outcomes.

For each non-credit course and program, there is a plan for assessment of learner outcomes and competencies. Assessment is conducted on a regular basis and the results, along with student success data, are analyzed and used for program improvement

The institution's non-credit course and program have identified student success measures including, but not limited to, retention, pass rates, licensure rates, employment rates, job promotion rates, and return on investment. Student success data is gathered and analyzed regularly, including the disaggregation of data to ensure the program is meeting its goals for equity among its relevant populations.

Description and Appraisal:

Non-credit classes and programs are evaluated with a pass/fail system that is based on the instructor's evaluation and the student meeting the objectives set forth at the beginning of the program, and outlined on the syllabus and course materials. For the measurement of other outcomes – jobs, salaries, licensure in some cases, there is a mechanism in place to identify and track results. Many of these outcomes however, require self-reporting by the students after completion of the program, which in turn requires constant outreach by staff. We track licensure and jobs for the grant funded programs that require reporting.

Student success is not defined nor captured in the same way as credit bearing programs.

It is difficult to measure employment rates, job promotion rates, and return on investment as it is all done through volunteered self-reporting. For non-grant funded programs, we do not measure equity goals specifically.

Challenges:

Data capture and integration of data in a way it can be analyzed and reported on.

Balancing and prioritizing limited financial and personnel resources.

Lack of clearinghouse type data that is helpful in tracking credit students that transfer on.

9. Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure

For each non-credit course and program, the institution publicly discloses to the public (via its website and other promotional materials) information about program costs, learning outcomes, and measures of student success.

Description and Appraisal:

All information related to courses, certificates, costs and outcomes are available on the NECC website with full disclosure and transparency.

Challenges:

Constant and detailed updating of public information.

Learning and working within the confines of the non-credit enrollment and student management system.

Future Plans – *Briefly describe the institution's plans for its non-credit programming.*

Looking ahead, NECC will continue to provide programs to meet the needs of our local community and to address the ongoing challenges of employers in the area seeking to fill high demand jobs. Existing programs will continually be evaluated and iterate to include enhancements and updates to curriculum to ensure relevancy and content required by employers and state testing agencies. New programs will be identified and researched for viability based on data from the Regional Blueprint and Lightcast Analyst, as well as, input from local industry, area organizations, and the community. This will help to determine and evaluate job opportunities on growth sectors, salary, and upward mobility projections. In addition, it will help to identify educational competencies and resources required.

NECC non-credit programs will continue to seek out, evaluate, and deploy new and different teaching modalities including on-line, self-paced, virtual instructor led, virtual reality, and in-person options to optimally impact the accessibility and impact of the training.

Collaboration with academic affairs during the creation of new credit bearing programs will be a continued and important focus that will help identify and ensure a process that considers module-based curriculum in a way that lends itself to being offered through non-credit classes that are stackable and create a direct pathway to credit bearing certificates and associate degrees.

To address future needs and resources, NECC non-credits looks to create a registrar position within the department to consolidate the responsibilities of creating classes in the Destiny One system, scheduling space and time for classes, maintaining student records (ensuring capture in Destiny One and Banner), arranging testing and assessment for students as

needed, enrolling student and help with self-enrollment processes, managing credit pathways process upon request and interfacing on IT and financial issues.

And, in all our endeavors and we look to improvement in the way we capture, store and analyze data that will allow for the ease and timeliness of accurate reporting and to inform strategic decision making and assessment of programs, plans and policies.

In a continued effort to integrate non-credit programs and learning

- b. Non-credit can be an area of significant growth. There needs to be focus on supporting the infrastructure, and investing further. And while NC will not come close to eclipsing credit, we will need to balance the needs of both credit and non-credit students while maintaining the highest standards and quality.

By the Numbers

1. Average number of companies served per year – 17
2. Ave number of Community Ed/open enrollment students served: 1,875
 1. Community education/Open Enrollment = 1,118
 2. Center for Adult Education programing at NECC = 516
 3. Essex County Corrections = 241
3. Ave # of community ed programs (cohorts) offered each year: 299
 1. Community Education = 259
 2. Center for Adult Education programing at NECC = 31
 3. Essex County Corrections = 3
4. FY2023 Grant and State awards: \$3,992,596
 1. Corporate and Community Education \$600,000

2. SNAP Path to Work award \$102,596
 3. DESE Adult and Community Learning Centers Award: \$480,722
 4. DESE MassSTEP award: \$74,808
 5. DESE Transition to College Award: \$162,000
 6. Essex County Corrections: \$2,572,471 (Combination DESE and jail contract).
5. # of newly implemented programs in FY2023 = 11
1. Cannabis (3 tracks)
 2. End of Life (Hospice care)
 3. EMT (from Credit side)
 4. 2 ESOL companion classes (for CNA and EMT)
 5. DESE ESOL program at Essex County Corrections
 6. DESE MassSTEP contextualized Bookkeeping and Accounting
 7. ESOL Supported Microsoft Office Certificate Program
 8. ESOL Supported Medical Front Desk Certificate Program
 9. Advanced ESOL for Medical Professionals
 10. GED 10-12 in Spanish (1 track)
 11. GED 7-9 in Spanish (2 tracks)
6. # of programs under review and evaluation - 8
1. ESOL Supported Coding
 2. ESOL Supported Accounts Payroll
 3. ESOL for Early Childhood Education (in collaboration with Academic Affairs)
 4. Advanced Manufacturing
 5. BioTech
 6. Clean Energy
 7. IT
 8. Behavioral Health