



# Expanding and Improving Work-Based Learning in Community Colleges

**Better Data and Measurement to Realize Goals for Students and Employers**  
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# Outline

- Overview of the study
- What is known about work-based learning in community colleges?
- Work-based learning on the ground
- Considerations for measurement
- Recommendations and conclusions

# Overview of the Study

# Context

- Work-based learning (WBL) helps students prepare for and access good jobs. It can include career awareness and exploration as well as more involved career preparation and training programs to build career-relevant skills.
- Across the country and at all levels of government, efforts are under way to expand and diversify WBL.
- Because community colleges enroll diverse student bodies and provide career-focused education and training, they can play a role in these efforts.

# Why measure WBL?

- Supporting effective measurement of WBL is key to understanding how colleges are meeting and contributing to their goals of expanding, diversifying, and ensuring quality for students and employers.

# Key research questions

- What is known about the implementation and outcomes of WBL models in community colleges, and what knowledge gaps exist?
- What strategies are being adopted by community colleges to measure WBL?
- What are potential approaches to WBL measurement, and what steps could address challenges to expanding and improving WBL in community colleges?

# Research design

- Focused on WBL in community colleges and more intensive forms of WBL, including internships, apprenticeships, cooperative education, clinicals and practica
- Reviewed literature and national datasets
- Interviewed experts from national organizations, state and regional workforce and education agencies, and six community colleges

## Key takeaways

- Community colleges have a critical role in realizing goals related to WBL expansion and diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Measurement is key for understanding progress
- To improve measurement will require the involvement of stakeholders across all levels of government and in the private sector



# What Is Known about WBL in Community Colleges?

# What do national data tell us about WBL?

- National data sources provide some insight to WBL trends but are limited
- Issues with data sources include not capturing
  - WBL (e.g., Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System);
  - students in nondegree programs (e.g., Adult Training and Education Survey);
  - community college experiences (e.g., National Longitudinal Survey of Youth);
  - all types of WBL (e.g., Registered Apprentices Partners Information System); or
  - a representative sample (e.g., National Association of Colleges and Employers)

# What are the trends in the growth and diversification of WBL?

- One in five adults report that they have completed a WBL experience
- Some data suggest WBL has been increasing over time
- Several efforts are under way at federal and local levels to expand WBL, but continue e challenges remain:
  - increasing the number of opportunities
  - expanding to new sectors and occupations
  - increasing gender and racial and ethnic diversity

# What are the outcomes and impacts of WBL?

- Research on the impacts of WBL in the community colleges is limited
  - Registered apprenticeships in particular have strong evidence of effectiveness, but research is more limited on other forms of WBL
- Studies show WBL can help employers identify talent and help job seekers secure jobs
- Stronger outcomes and impacts have been observed
  - When WBL experiences are paid
  - When experiences are longer
- Unpaid WBL, such as clinicals and practica required for occupational licenses, may limit equitable access to opportunities

# Work-Based Learning on the Ground: The Experiences of Six Community Colleges

**TABLE 1**  
**Colleges Interviewed for This Report**

| <b>School</b>   | <b>Work-based learning required for</b>              | <b>Credit and noncredit offerings</b>   |
|---|--|---|
| Central Piedmont Community College (North Carolina)     | Some majors  | 160 hours spent on the WBL site = 1 credit. Formal internships program for certificate that is noncredit  |
| Community College of Rhode Island (Rhode Island)        | Some programs and majors                             | Hours vary depending on academic program and co-op course. Noncredit options through Division of Workforce Partnerships, career services, and faculty engagement  |
| Cincinnati State Technical and Community College (Ohio) | Co-op is mandatory for associate's degree program    | Varies between full time (480 hours spent on the WBL site = 2 credits) and part time (300–465 hours spent on the WBL job site = 1 credit).  |
| St. Petersburg College (Florida)                        | Internship required for associate of science degrees | 60 hours spent on the WBL site = 1 credit; 180-hour internship requirement. Noncredit options include service learning, business field experience, job shadowing, mentorship, simulated enterprise.                               |
| MiraCosta College (California)                          | 12 of 81 associate's degrees                         | Internship variable 1–3 credit courses, and co-op variable 1–4 credit courses. Both require 60 hours spent on the WBL site if unpaid or 75 hours spent on the WBL site if paid. Some noncredit internships, and service learning. |
| Bluegrass Community and Technical College (Kentucky)    | 25 majors  | Varies between clinical (45–60 hours spent on the WBL site = 1 credit) to co-op and practicum (60–90 hours spent on the WBL site = 1 credit). Some noncredit options.   |

# How is WBL structured?

- WBL is typically linked to academic or instructional components, assessment of student learning, and the opportunity to earn credit
- Where WBL is not mandatory, noncredit options provide flexibility
- Accommodating working learners is a key challenge, and some colleges look for ways to help students meet WBL requirements through their existing employment
- Restrictions on payment for clinicals and practica are also a challenge for students who need to work for pay

# How are WBL opportunities developed and supported?

- Some colleges have dedicated staff (sometimes called a “WBL coordinator”) who develops opportunities and supports students
- Teaching faculty also play an important role, especially where dedicated staff are not present
- Respondents say that staff capacity is an issue in expanding WBL and supporting students



# Considerations for Measurement

# What information do colleges collect on WBL?

- Participation in WBL using course codes
  - Harder to count informal or noncredit experiences
- Student and employer experience using feedback surveys
  - Issues with low response rates
- Collection of data on student characteristics, outcomes, and impacts is limited

# What information is not collected and why?

- Employment and educational outcomes for students
  - Why collect? To assess quality and make the case to students and employers and for institutional support
  - One key challenge is accessing wage record data
- Student demographic information
  - Why collect? To understand who is accessing programs and answer questions about equity
  - One key challenge is the disconnect between institutional data collection and data collection by WBL staff

# What are additional unanswered questions?

- Why do students not take advantage of WBL opportunities?
- How do we understand the differences in outcomes between different types of WBL?
- What do we know about other employment-focused activities, such as job shadowing, informational interviews, or career fairs?
- Is lack of pay a barrier to access in some programs, creating equity concerns? What policy/program strategies can overcome this challenge?

# How do colleges staff data collection and what are the challenges?

- Colleges benefited from having:
  - dedicated staff – e.g. co-op coordinators – to identify and track work-based learning opportunities for students
  - institutional support for data collection, including support from institutional research offices
- Even with support, tracking work-based learning experiences outside the credit structure is a challenge
- Limited funding is barrier to data collection and measurement

# How do colleges track and report data?

- The credit structure facilitates tracking of WBL experiences but leaves some information and programs out
- Colleges supplement institutional data collection with “homegrown” databases
- There are opportunities to expand how data and reports are used to improve programs
- External funding can help improve measurement, but when resources go away, institutional support is needed

# Recommendations and Conclusions

## Federal policymakers should...

- create a cross-agency working group on WBL to develop a common definition for postsecondary education
- support the implementation and measurement of WBL in education and training programs
- develop data elements for nationally available datasets



## State education and workforce officials should...

- develop state definitions of WBL
- develop common data elements for tracking WBL
- share employment outcomes data with colleges to support performance improvement
- incorporate WBL into state longitudinal systems of data tracking

## Community college leaders should...

- integrate WBL data elements into data systems
- incentivize employers and students to complete surveys on WBL
- provide support for data collection and performance improvement

## Philanthropy should...

- provide funding to support the collaborative work to establish common definitions and data elements
- support technical assistance, capacity building and opportunities for peer learning

# Thank you for viewing!

[Click here to read the full report](#)

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