



## Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

### Vermont Advancement Grant Outcomes

Advancement grants are need-based grants awarded to Vermont adult students who are trying to improve their employability, whether by gaining specific job skills through a training program or through higher education. VSAC completed studies in 2016 and 2018, and shared findings with the House and Senate Appropriations, Education, Commerce and Finance Committees. The studies showed strong outcomes for the program. In the fall of 2024, VSAC updated that study by collecting background information on the types of nondegree programs funded, the outcomes of those programs, and the numbers and demographics of the Vermonters served. In addition, we also conducted a survey of nondegree grant recipients to collect information on the impact of this grant program on their employment, salary, ongoing college attendance, as well as other aspects of their life such as housing.



# Vermont Advancement Grant Outcomes Study

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In 1982 the Vermont General Assembly created the first nondegree grant program in the country as a need-based program to ensure that unemployed Vermonters had affordable access to training and education that would ultimately lead to employment. Now known as the “Advancement Grant”, in its original design applicants needed to be receiving unemployment benefits to receive a grant. The program expanded in 1984 to include under-employed Vermonters, opening the program to applicants who were working, but not receiving a livable wage and to applicants from families receiving state aid.



Today the average Advancement grant recipient is 35 years old, female, lives in a household of two with an annual household income of \$25,456; this program has stayed focused and committed to unemployed and under-employed Vermont families. It empowers Vermonters to choose the training and education path best suited for them.

From its start, the Advancement grant has been available to low-income Vermonters to access three overarching types of education and training:

1. It can be used at any approved **training program** that will increase an applicant’s employability. Approved training programs either must document that at least

50 percent of their students are employed in the field in which they were trained or be accredited by a national or state accreditation agency.

*In FY 2024, 812 adult students used \$2,919,844 in Advancement grants to access training programs for CDL licenses, to obtain certification as childcare providers, to enter health professions such as LNAs and dental assistants, to enter the trades as construction workers, linemen, and cosmetologists, the culinary arts and many other fields.*

2. Advancement grants allow low-income adult students to obtain the **driver's education** they need to get a Vermont driver's license. Vermont's lack of widespread public transportation is a significant barrier to employment in most areas outside of Chittenden County. VSAC has found that a driver's license is a critical step to becoming employed in Vermont.

*In FY 2024, 72 adult students received \$58,320 in Advancement grants for driver's education.*

3. Lastly, adult students can use Advancement grants at **colleges and universities**. Applicants who are trying to decide if they are capable of successfully enrolling in a college or university can use the Advancement grant to take a course through a postsecondary institution to prove to themselves that they can successfully tackle college-level work. Students who have prerequisites that they need to take before they can gain admittance to a college, also use the nondegree grant to meet those requirements.

*In FY 2024, 326 adult students received \$741,671 in Advancement grants to take college-level courses with 58 percent of these students enrolling in courses at the Community College of Vermont.*

Vermonters cannot access the Advancement Grant until after they graduate from high school or have been out of high school for a minimum of three months.

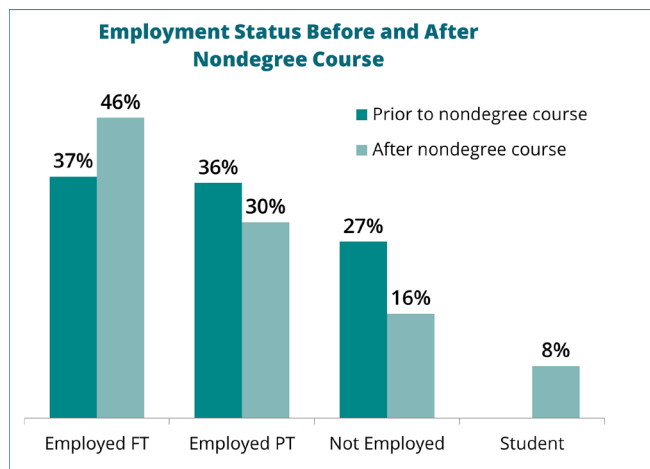
We recently surveyed our FY '24 Advancement grant recipients to assess the results of their grants on their employment, their continuing education, and overall, on the quality of their lives; 305 students awarded an Advancement grant in FY '24 completed an online survey between November 6 and December 14, 2024.



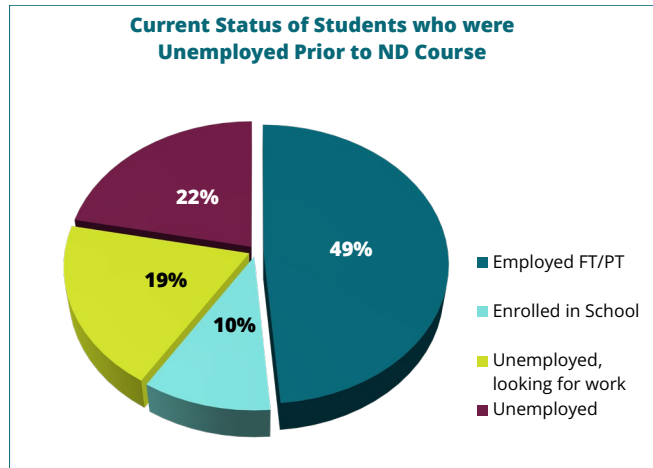
We were looking to answer two major questions. For students taking training courses, did the grant help increase either their employability or help them move forward in their career field? And if the students were pursuing college-level courses, were they continuing their education following the nondegree course?

## Findings/Results

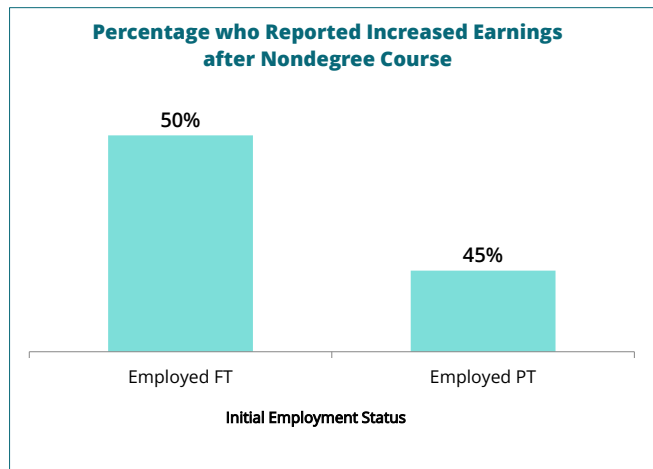
1. Nearly half of adult students were employed full-time at the time the survey was conducted; this represents an increase of 9 percentage points in full-time employment compared to prior to completing their nondegree course.



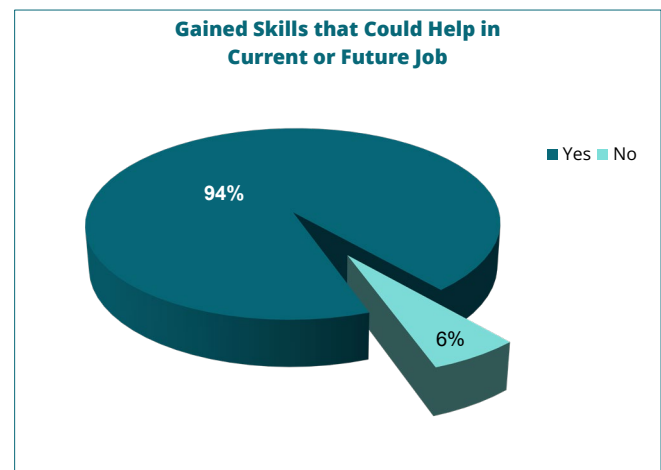
2. Among adult students who were unemployed prior to completing the nondegree course, 49% were employed either full-time or part-time at the time of the survey. An additional 10% were in school. Nineteen percent were unemployed, but looking for work. Twenty-two percent were unemployed.



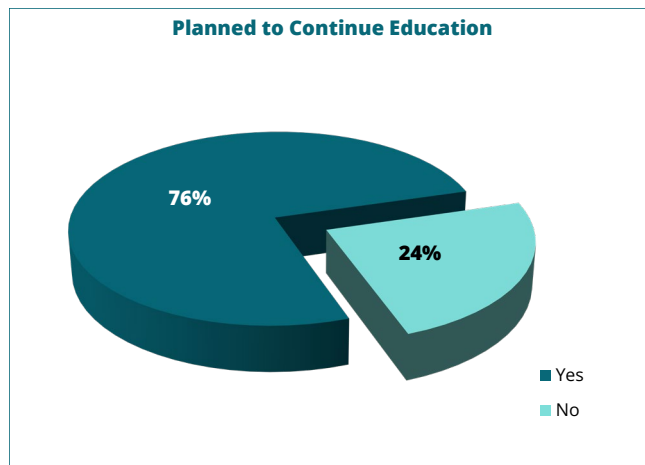
3. Many survey respondents who were employed at the time they started their nondegree course report increased earnings: 44% of these students reported an hourly increase in earnings of \$3 or more after completing their course.



4. Recipients of the Advancement grant overwhelmingly felt that the skills they gained in their training would help them in their current or future jobs.



5. Likewise, three-quarters of students who used an Advancement grant to enroll in a nondegree course planned to continue their education. More than 50% of these students plan to pursue a credential of value or enroll in a certificate program.



### Challenges that respondents faced while taking the course

Three out of ten grant recipients reported it was difficult to earn enough money to make ends meet while they were in school. Approximately 10 percent of respondents reported having difficulty in paying for housing or food while enrolled in the nondegree course.

We also collected comments from survey respondents listing some of the challenges that they faced in taking a course. We have attached a sample of these to show the breadth of concerns that students faced and overcame to take the class:

- *"It was somewhat difficult to schedule things because of work and early morning classes and driving time"*
- *"I found it difficult to arrange travel but made it work"*
- *"I was relying on my mom to take me to work and she couldn't always get me there and I received my license through this class so now I can get myself to work"*
- *"English is not my first language and my professional experience would not be relevant in the USA, so I needed to start from "scratch""*
- *"My learning differences made it more challenging to go to a traditional school."*
- *"Difficult to balance working and education with family"*

Despite these challenges, survey respondents also commented on the outcomes they experienced that were not necessarily what we were primarily measuring.

Below are some of the reported outcomes experienced by Advancement grant recipients in addition to the skills gained:

- *“Leveraged training to make changes at the non-profit I oversee”*
- *“Increased self-awareness, improved outlook on life”*
- *“The connections that I gained with other classmates and teachers really can’t be underestimated. I feel like I will continue to have a professional relationship with so many that I would not have met otherwise”*
- *“Even with my learning differences (ADHD, Dyslexia, etc.), I gained confidence from this program and believe in myself more now!”*
- *“I am learning how to network and utilize connections and how to use GitHub so I can show others my work”*
- *“With being able to take the course I took I was able to open my very own nail salon and be able to provide services to local people. I was also able to show my children there is always something more to life than what you have handed to you and you are never too old to learn new things”*

## Conclusion

The data gathered from the 2024 survey of 305 students yielded valuable information on the results of the Advancement grant program on the lives of adult students. The data and the comments from grant recipients support the findings that these grants have a positive impact on Vermonters’ employment, salary and wages, their ongoing college attendance, and other important aspects of their lives. These grants are a key element of making job training more affordable.

These findings also underscore the importance of the Advancement grant program and its power to transform lives through access to education and training. VSAC will engage with the legislative committees of jurisdiction in early 2025 to discuss this report and urge continued funding of this critical program.

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*This whole process was amazing and changed my life in a really positive way, I'm not just scraping by anymore and am looking forward to the future.*  
~ FY'24 Advancement Grant recipient

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