



Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

Vermont Nondegree Grant Outcomes Study

Section E.605(e) of the FY 2017 Appropriations Act (H. 875, Act 172) directed VSAC to study the outcomes of its nondegree grant awards. Nondegree 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 that study in late 2016 and shared it with the House and Senate Appropriations, Education, Commerce and Finance Committees. The study showed strong outcomes for the program. In the fall of 2018, 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 Nondegree Grant Outcomes Study

*Report to the General Assembly
January 22, 2019*

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. In its original design applicants needed to be receiving unemployment benefits to receive a grant. The program was 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 assistance.

Today the average nondegree recipient is 34 years old, female, lives in a household of two with an annual income of \$19,750; 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 inception the nondegree grant has been available to low-income Vermonters to provide access to three overarching types of education and training.

- It can be used at any training program identified by the applicant that will increase his or her 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 2018, 1,247 adult students used \$2,315,691 in nondegree 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 cosmetologist, the culinary arts and many other fields.

- Nondegree grants can also be used by low-income adult students to obtain the driver's education they need to acquire a Vermont driver's license. Vermont's lack of widespread public transportation is a significant barrier to employment in most areas of the state of Vermont outside of Chittenden County. VSAC has identified a driver's license as a critical step to becoming employed in Vermont.

In FY 2018, 72 adult students received \$55,275 in nondegree grants for driver's education.

- Lastly, adult students can use nondegree 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 nondegree grant to take a course through a school's continuing education program or other nondegree programs to prove to themselves that they can successfully tackle college-level work. Students who have prerequisites that they need to take before they can be admitted to a college, also use the nondegree grant to meet those requirements.



In FY '18, 473 adult students received \$728,5715 in nondegree grants to take college-level courses with most students taking advantage of courses at the Community College of Vermont.

Vermonters cannot access this program until after they graduate from high school or have been out of high school for a minimum of three months. They may use up to six nondegree grants throughout their lifetime, allowing for the multiple career changes we know that Vermonters need to be prepared for.

We recently surveyed our FY '18 nondegree recipients to assess the results of their grants on their employment, their continuing education, and overall on the quality of their lives; 448 students awarded a nondegree grant in FY '18 completed an online survey between November 8 and December 9, 2018. Of those who responded to the survey, 63 percent were or became employed in the sectors of Education & Training, Health Sciences, and Human Services.

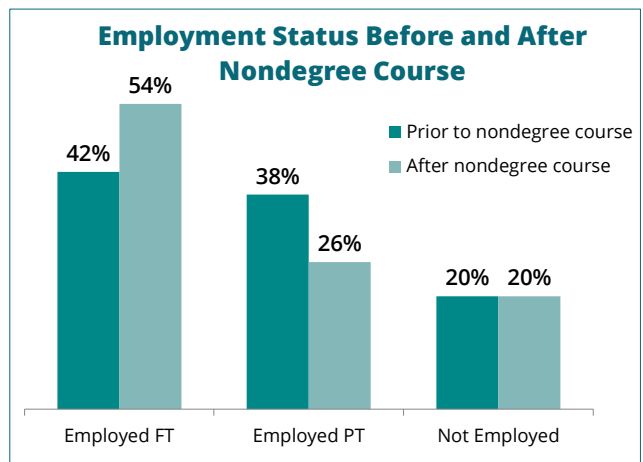


We were looking for two major outcomes. For students taking training courses, had the grant helped to increase either their employability or helped them move forward in their career field? And if the students were pursuing college-level courses, were they continuing their education following the nondegree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

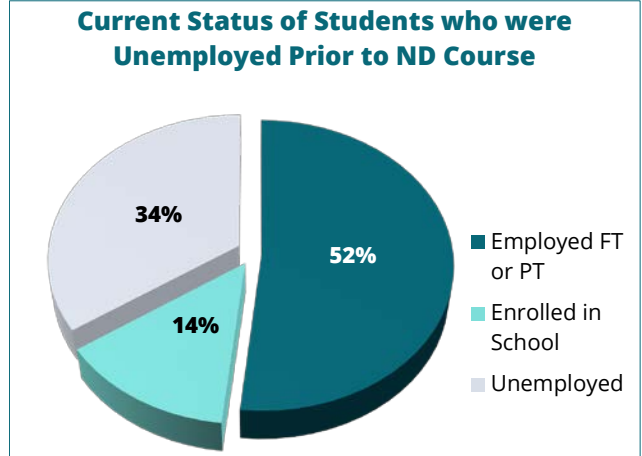
Findings/Results

1. There was a significant positive shift in employment status after students took the nondegree course.

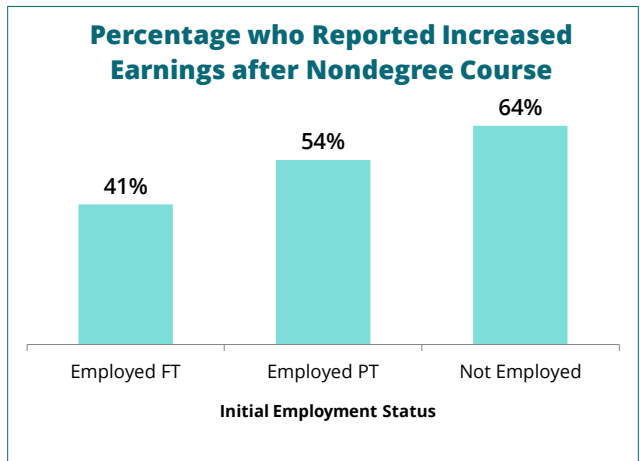
Full-time employment increased from 42 percent to 54 percent, a 29 percent increase. This shift was achieved primarily by moving the number of recipients who were employed part-time to full-time employment.



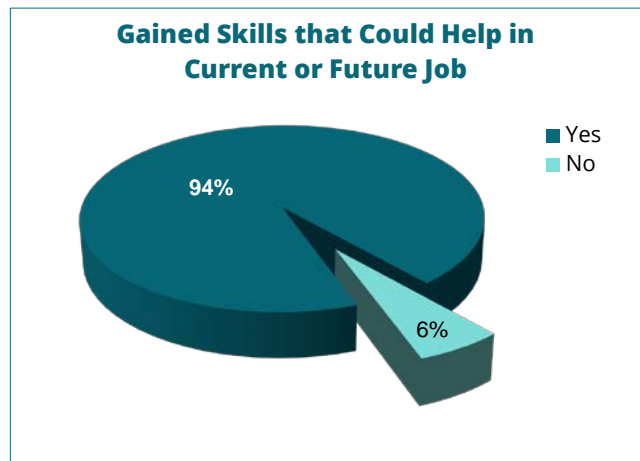
Among adult students who were unemployed prior to completing the nondegree course, 52 percent were employed either full-time or part-time at the time of the survey and an additional 14 percent were in school.



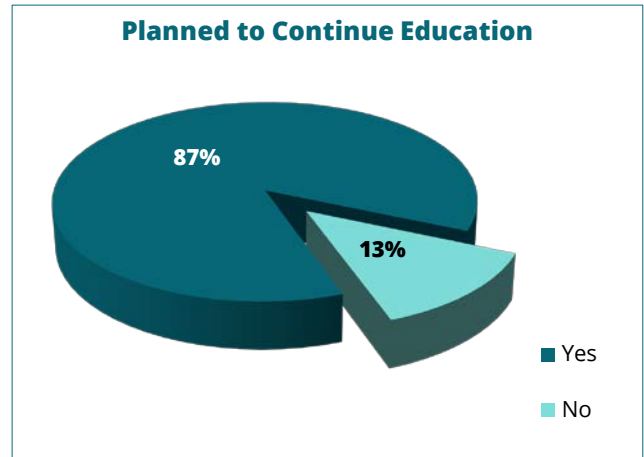
2. Respondents report increased earnings after completing the course, regardless of their initial employment status.



3. Recipients of the nondegree grant who enrolled in training overwhelmingly felt that the skills they gained in their training would help them in their current or future jobs.



4. Likewise, students who used a nondegree grant to attend a college course found that they were able to be successful taking college-level courses and planned on continuing their education.



Challenges that respondents faced while taking the course

Nearly 15 percent of respondents reported having difficulty in paying for housing or food while they were enrolled. We were interested in exploring whether completion of nondegree courses helped Vermonters face these challenges. While most respondents reported increased wages due to the nondegree course, the wage increase's impact on securing housing and/or food needs to be assessed over a longer period of time than covered in this study.

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 difficult to be in a class after working 12-hour night shift"
- "Had to put bills on my credit cards so I could afford to be away from work..."
- "The school is very far and I can't use the grant \$ toward transportation or lodging so it cost me a lot"
- "Transition from jail to society was difficult"

Survey respondents also commented on the outcomes they experienced that weren't necessarily what we were primarily measuring. Outcomes experienced by nondegree grant recipients in addition to the skills gained included:

- “Got me noticed at work, so I might get a pay increase”
- “Felt like miracles can happen to me! Sense of hope for the future”
- “...When I found out how much my first course cost, I decided that I couldn't justify spending that amount of money on it; we don't have the income. But after my daughter suggested that I call VSAC, I learned about VSAC's Non-Degree grants. I am so thankful for this program; it's made a huge difference for my future prospects. Thank you so much!!!”
- “This course helped me tremendously as a business owner.”



Conclusion

As noted on the cover page to this report, the FY 2017 Appropriations Act directed VSAC to study the outcomes of nondegree grant awards. The data gathered from a survey of 448 students yielded important information on the results of the nondegree grant program on the lives of adult students. The data and the comments from grant recipients support the findings that these grants have a significant 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 nondegree 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 2019 to discuss this report and urge greater funding of this critical program.

Helped me gain skills in the type of work I really want to be doing.

– FY18 ND grant recipient
