



# **Vermont Student Assistance Corporation**

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## **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 by either gaining specific job skills through a training program or through higher education. In the fall of 2016, VSAC collected 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

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*Report to the General Assembly*

*January 3, 2016*

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 up 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 33 years old, female, lives in a household of two with an annual income of \$20,444; 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 2016, 1,179 adult students used nondegree grants to access training programs for CDL licenses, to obtain certification as childcare providers, to enter into health professions such as massage therapy and medical transcriptionists, to enter into fitness professions, 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 2016, 111 adult students received \$86,010 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 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 '16, 467 adult students received \$687,305 in nondegree grants to take college-level courses with the majority of 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 '16 nondegree recipients to assess the results of their grants on their employment, their continuing education, and overall on the quality of their lives; 459 students awarded a nondegree grant in FY '16 completed an online survey between October 14 and November 8, 2016. Based on the number of students in the survey pool (1,585), the overall survey findings have a confidence interval of 95 percent with a margin of error of +/- 3.9 percent. Of those who responded to the survey, 58 percent were or became employed in the sectors of Education & Training, Health Sciences, and Human Services.

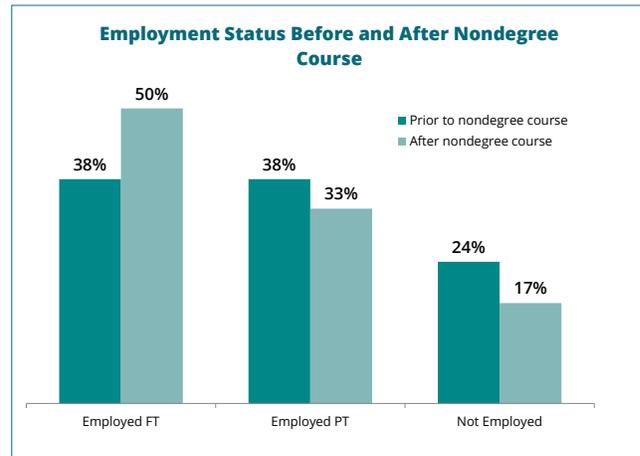
We were looking for two major outcomes. For students taking training courses, had the grant helped to increase either their employability or helped them move forward in their

career field? And if the students were pursuing college-level courses, were they continuing their education following the nondegree course?

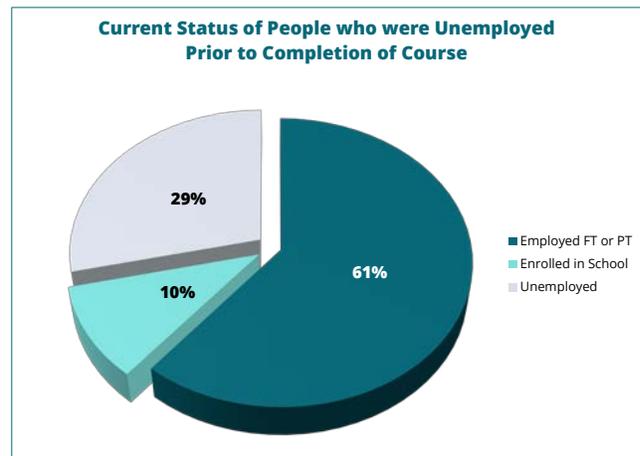
## Findings/Results

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

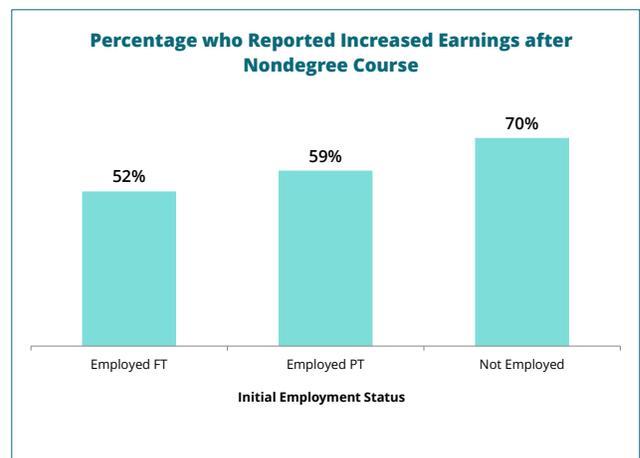
Full-time employment increased from 38 percent to 50 percent, a 31 percent increase. This shift was achieved primarily by decreasing the number of recipients who were unemployed with the rest moving from part-time to full-time employment.



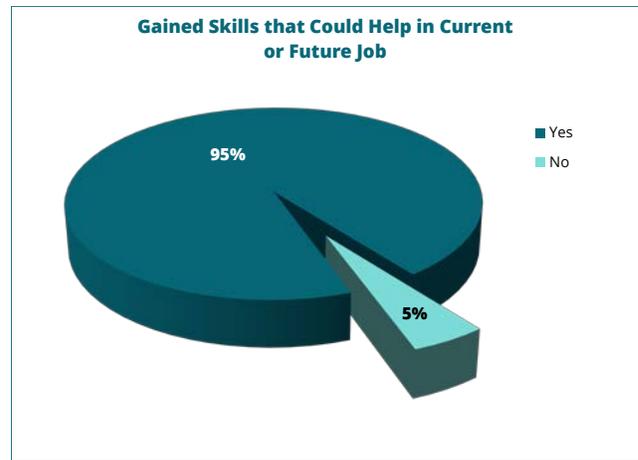
Among adult students who were unemployed prior to completing the nondegree course, 61 percent were employed either full-time or part-time at the time of the survey and an additional 10 percent were in school.



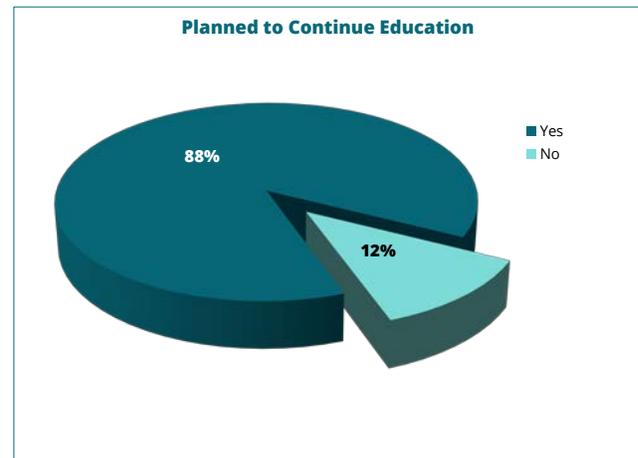
2. Respondents report increased earnings after completing the course, regardless of their initial employment status.



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

We were interested in exploring whether or not completion of nondegree courses helped with challenges Vermonters face in securing stable housing. While the majority of respondents reported increased wages due to the nondegree course, the wage increase's impact on housing needs further analysis over a longer period than used in this study.

We also collected a number of 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 in order to take the class:

- *"I was homeless...; I knew I would need a good career so I turned to VSAC to help in the process. I now work full time 50+, while taking courses at a local college, I also volunteer several days a week at the local homeless shelter and have my own apartment so my son can come visit... the nondegree grant from VSAC helped start a great life while giving back."*
- *"Things were very tight financially until I completed my training and got hired at CCTA. We received Section 8, Reach Up, and Food Stamps."*
- *"It was difficult to find adult daycare."*
- *"Supplies, books, gas to get to school were larger expenses than anticipated on top of what I also had to pay for the course even after the help of the grant."*
- *"Cost for bus."*



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:

- *"Found my heart's work and path in life!! :)."*
- *"Gave me the confidence to start my own business."*
- *"Enabled me to obtain CDL and get hired at CCTA. No longer requiring Reach Up or Food Stamps."*
- *"Gave me more confidence in meeting people at school and work that allowed me to "network" and open more doors for me."*
- *"Bought a home."*
- *"Enabled me to buy my first home."*
- *"Helped me find a better career. The career I was in previously had very little employment opportunities."*

- *“Recognition in workplace.”*
- *“The class i took was last general education class left of both an AS and BA from more than 5 years ago. i did not have the \$ to buy the class. i used a VSAC grant to do so and now have 2 degrees and a lot more confidence and am more employable BUT am a single mom with a crazy between state custody arrangement and have been poor so long, it is a bit of a challenge to figure the next steps.”*

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“Met general education and admissions requirements for transfer to a 4-year degree program”

~ FY16 ND grant recipient

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## Conclusions

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 459 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 2017 to discuss this report and urge greater funding of this critical program.