Can Microcredentials Re-engage 40.4 Million Learners?

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Hosted in partnership with:

straighterline
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Disengaged Learner Research

In 2021, StraighterLine conducted its first empirical research into the 40.4 million Some College, No Credential population.

After learning why SCNC disengage from higher ed, we wanted to ask two ultimate questions:

1. How can higher ed get the some college, no credential population to return?
2. What role do alternative credentials play in getting working adults to return to college?
## Persona Insights: Disengaged Learners and Return Paths to Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Reason for Program Disengagement</th>
<th>Sean (n=305)</th>
<th>Whitney (n=372)</th>
<th>Sandra (n=336)</th>
<th>Frank (n=57)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reached a Point in Career Where They Feel Stuck (Strongly Agree/Agree)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood to Pursue an Undergraduate Degree Through Degree Completion Program (Extremely/Very Likely)</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Motivating Factor to Enroll in a Degree Completion Program</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve salary (38%)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve salary (73%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal goal (39%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Love for learning (23%)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect of Credits for Prior Learning on Interest in Pursuing Undergraduate Degree (Greatly Increase/Increase Interest)</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect of Stackable Microcredentials on Interest in Pursuing Undergraduate Degree (Greatly Increase/Increase Interest)</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Current Careers
Career Level

Which of the following best describes your career level? (n=1,100)

- Early or entry-level: 50%
- Mid-level: 39%
- Director or senior level: 8%
- C-level: 4%

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Career Stagnation

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: I’ve reached a point in my career where I feel as though I’m stuck or don’t have the opportunity to advance. (n=1,100)

- 20% Strongly agree
- 26% Agree
- 29% Neither agree nor disagree
- 16% Disagree
- 9% Strongly disagree

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Interest in Degree Completion Programs
Likelihood of Pursuing a Degree Completion Program

How likely would you be to pursue an undergraduate degree through a degree completion program? (n=1,097)

- Extremely likely: 12%
- Very likely: 17%
- Somewhat likely: 32%
- Not very likely: 23%
- Not at all likely: 17%
Reasons for Considering a Degree Completion Program

Which of the following would be motivating factors or goals if you were to enroll in a degree completion program? Please select all that apply. (n=1,086)

- Improve salary: 48%
- Personal goal: 44%
- Career advancement: 32%
- Career change: 29%
- Love of learning: 27%
- Strengthen job security: 25%
- Reskill: 15%
- Reenter the workforce: 15%
- Other: 4%
Factors for Selecting a Degree Completion Program

When thinking about degree completion programs, what factors would be important when making your decision about a potential program? Please select all that apply. (n=1,086)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The tuition or cost of the degree</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The speed at which I can complete my degree</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of my credits that transfer</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal, quick, and understandable communication from the institution</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to earn credentials, such as badges or certificates, that demonstrate my competencies along the way toward completing my degree</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to earn additional credits through existing education</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand strength of the college or university</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies for Enrollment
Credit for Prior Learning Interest

If an institution offered credit for prior learning, where you could earn credit toward your degree or credential based upon knowledge and skills you’ve earned outside the classroom, what effect would that have on your interest in pursuing an undergraduate degree? (n=1,074)

- Greatly increase interest: 36%
- Increase interest: 42%
- No effect on interest: 19%
- Decrease interest: 2%
- Greatly decrease interest: 1%
Stackable Microcredentials Interest

For the purpose of this research, alternative or microcredentials are defined as any credential, outside of a degree, that signals an individual’s knowledge or skills within a particular subject area. If an institution offered alternative or microcredentials that were stackable, that is to say that courses and certificates could build upon each other and count as credit toward each subsequent credential, ultimately building to a full degree, what effect would that have on your interest in pursuing an undergraduate degree? (n=1,074)

- 32% Greatly increase interest
- 44% Increase interest
- 22% No effect on interest
- 1% Decrease interest
- 1% Greatly decrease interest

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The Take Aways

- **46%** of respondents feel they are **stuck in their careers** without opportunities to advance.

- **29%** were **very/extremely likely** to pursue a **degree completion program**.

- **Traditional degree completion programs** alone are **not enough** to entice learners to return to higher education.

- **76%** of respondents said **stackable microcredentials** would **increase/greatly increase** their interest in a degree program.
Questions from the Audience
Contact Information

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Additional Information and Resources

The webcast recording and additional resources will be available in the next week: wcet.wiche.edu/events/webcasts.
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July 30-31, 2024 | St. Louis, Missouri
Save the Date for the WCET Annual Meeting

Join us October 8-10 in Long Beach, CA!

Registration opens May 9
Thank you

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