



Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

Vermont Advancement Grant Outcomes

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, known as Advancement Grants. 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 2022, 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

*Report to the General Assembly
January 10, 2023*

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 income of \$23,113; 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.

- It can be used at any 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 2022, 765 adult students used \$2,226,412 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 cosmetologist, the culinary arts and many other fields.

- 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 of the state of Vermont outside of Chittenden County. VSAC has found that a driver's license is a critical step to becoming employed in Vermont.

In FY 2022, 54 adult students received \$40,490 in Advancement grants for driver's education.

- 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 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 gain admittance to a college, also use the nondegree grant to meet those requirements.

In FY 2022, 369 adult students received \$657,581 in Advancement grants to take college-level courses with 57 percent of these students enrolling in 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 Advancement grants throughout their lifetime, allowing for the multiple career changes we know that Vermonters need to be prepared for.

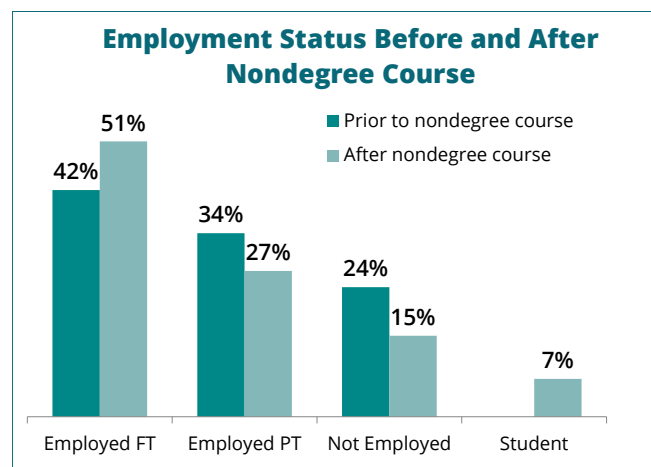
We recently surveyed our FY '22 Advancement grant recipients to assess the results of their grants on their employment, their continuing education, and overall, on the quality of their lives; 257 students awarded an Advancement grant in FY '22 completed an online survey between October 13 and November 29, 2022.



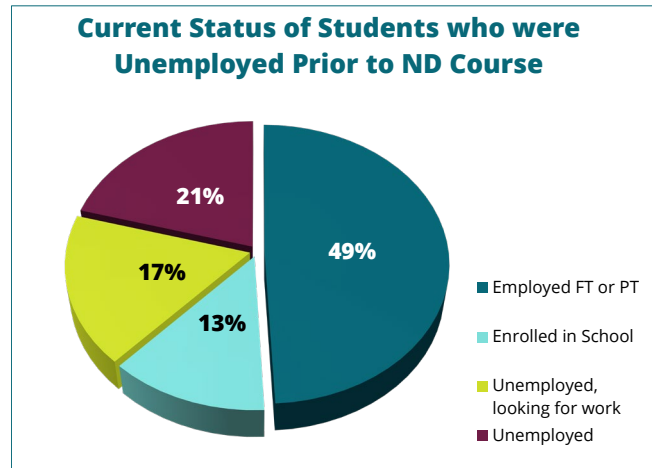
We were looking for two major outcomes. For students taking training courses, did the grant help increase either their employability or help them move forward in their career field? And if the students were pursuing college-level courses, were they continuing their education following the nondegree course?

Findings/Results

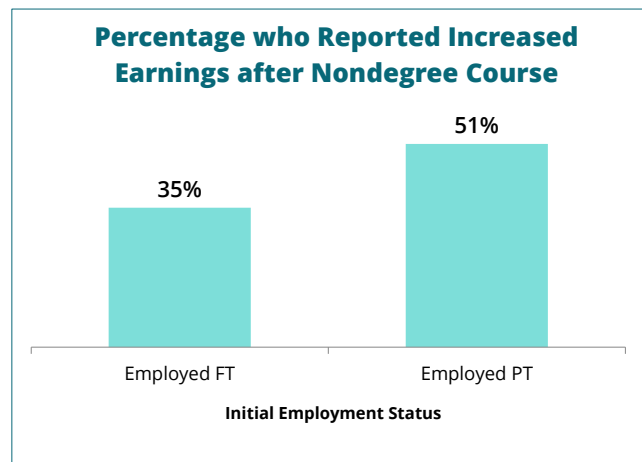
1. More than half of adult students were employed full-time at the time of the survey was conducted; this represents an increase of 9 percentage points in full-time employment compared to prior to completing their nondegree course.



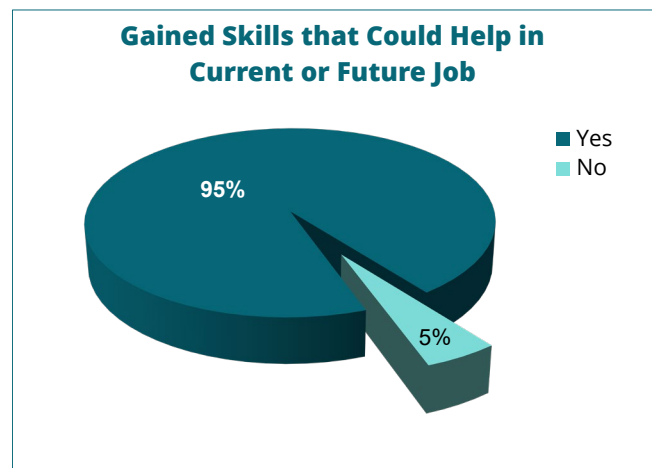
2. Among adult students who were unemployed prior to completing the nondegree course, 49% were employed either full-time or part-time at the time of the survey. An additional 13% were in school. Seventeen percent were unemployed, but looking for work. Seventeen percent were unemployed, but looking for work.



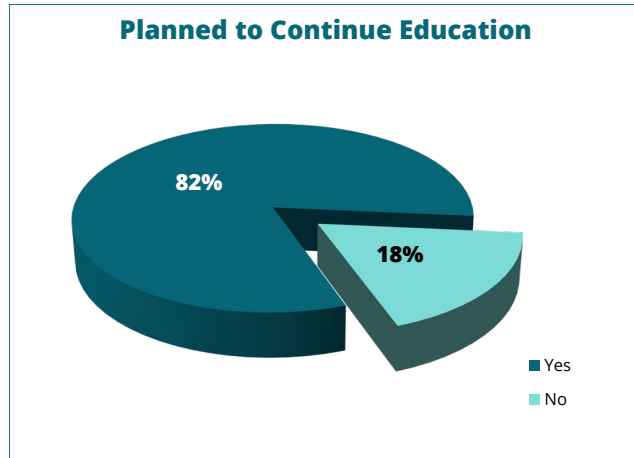
3. Survey respondents who were employed at the time they started their nondegree course report increased earnings: 45% of these students reported earning \$3 or more dollars per hour more after completing their nondegree course.



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



5. Likewise, students who used an Advancement grant to enroll in a college course found that they were able to be successful taking college-level courses and planned to continue their education. More than 50% of these students plan to enroll in a certificate program.



Challenges that respondents faced while taking the course

More than 12 percent of respondents reported having difficulty in paying for housing or food while enrolled in the nondegree course. We were interested in exploring whether completion of nondegree courses helped Vermonters face these challenges. While many respondents reported increased wages due to the nondegree course, the wage increase's impact on securing housing and/or food would need to be assessed over a longer period 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 a bit expensive to get there and back each week because diesel was and still is so expensive."*
- *"I didn't account for material fees in my application and was met with some expenses I didn't budget for."*
- *"It has been difficult fitting work and school in, but I've managed to juggle both of them still."*
- *"Health challenges made it difficult but the program allowed me to catch up and still gain the knowledge to receive my certificate"*

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:

- *“Gained skills and knowledge to open a business”*
- *“Opened my eyes to other possibilities”*
- *“I am able to actually get metal to weld together, so i can save cars, our farm equipment, make strong stuff that doesn’t break and fix it when it does. It wasn’t really about jobs or pay just making the farm work”*
- *“The advancement grant helped me immensely when I went to CCV to take one class. I thought at the time I’d just take one class to help with finding a job but I managed to go back to school part time and I am working towards a certificate and an associates degree.”*
- *“I would not have been able to do this program without the grant, and after finishing I make double the amount I made before. Also there’s no price on finding your purpose! I have more than just more confidence, I understand myself better and am in a position to give back to society.”*

Conclusion

As noted on the cover page to this report, the FY 2017 Appropriations Act directed VSAC to study the outcomes of nondegree Advancement grant awards. The data gathered from a survey of 257 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 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 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 2023 to discuss this report and urge greater funding of this critical program.

I really enjoyed my time at Vermont Med Ed! It taught me a lot of practical skills I use every day at work and prepared me well for the LNA exam.
~ FY’22 Advancement Grant recipient
