

NEW BACCALAUREATE SERIES

Prospects for Scaling Community College Baccalaureates in Six Great Lakes States



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As part of our research on the community college baccalaureate (CCB), we studied the prospects of adopting and scaling CCB degrees in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Higher education leaders in these six Great Lakes states recognized the potential for CCB degrees to increase academic, geographic and financial access to higher education but concerns about mission creep, program duplication, and competition with universities within their states were on their minds. All leaders thought a more in-depth approach to analyzing labor force demand for CCB degree graduates would be helpful. In response, we used federal and state datasets to estimate job vacancies and annual degree conferral and found openings in business, software development, early childhood education, and registered nursing that may hold promise for CCB degrees in one or more Great Lakes states.

BACKGROUND

We began our study on the prospects for scaling community college baccalaureate (CCB) degrees about two years before the world was stricken with Covid-19. Since March 2020, we have seen the dire impact of the pandemic on global health and the economy. By early July, the Department of Labor (DOL) recorded 35.8 million workers were officially unemployed and receiving benefits, were approved but still waiting for benefits, or had applied and were waiting to be approved (Shierholz, 2020a). This unemployment crisis on top of the pandemic is especially distressing for workers without bachelor's degrees. Whereas 15% of bachelor's holders were unemployed in May 2020, 25% of individuals with only a high school diploma and 21% of those with some college were out of work. The chance of bachelor's holders being called back to work are twice that of workers with only a high school diploma or some college, with a majority in these two groups having no chance of being called back to a prior job (Shierholz, 2020b).

Further complicating this picture, unemployment rates during the pandemic vary dramatically by race, ethnicity and gender, with racially minoritized and female workers being hit much harder than whites and males (Carnevale & Gulish, 2020). For example, Black and Hispanic women are experiencing unemployment rates of 25% and 30% compared to white females at 18%. Black and Hispanic males are similarly disadvantaged relative to white males, at 23% for Black males and 22% for Hispanic males compared to 14% for white males (Shierholz, 2020). Knowing educational attainment and economic security are related to race, ethnicity and gender, it is important for states to align higher education and workforce policies during and beyond the pandemic in ways that help to close systemic inequities for racially minoritized groups.

The Community College Baccalaureate (CCB) is a college completion policy that requires authorizing legislation in most states. Understanding how CCB degrees contribute to the state policy landscape during and

beyond the pandemic is important. If CCB degrees are shown to improve baccalaureate attainment among underserved populations, helping these individuals secure stable employment and living-wage earnings, it strengthens the case for state and institutional adoption and scaling of CCB degrees.

PROSPECTS FOR SCALING CCBS

CCB programs are growing, with 23 states currently authorizing community colleges to confer these degrees. Eleven of these states provide all community colleges in their state the opportunity to do so (Soler, 2019). As the number of CCBS grow across the country it is important to understand factors that contribute to scaling these degrees. Both the higher education and workforce development policy contexts influence state and college decisions about adoption, but they play out differently from state to state. To better understand the Great Lakes state policy context, we studied the higher education and workforce development policies in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. We conducted interviews with agency leaders in all six states, going even deeper in Ohio because of this state's recent adoption of CCB degrees, and we also analyzed supply and demand data in key industries and occupations.

The research questions that guided our study are:

- What is the status of CCB degrees in the six Great Lakes states (IL, IN, MI, MN, OH & WI)?
- How do higher education leaders in six Great Lakes states view CCB degrees relative to the higher education and workforce development policy context?
- What lessons can we learn from Ohio's experience with CCB policy and workforce development?
- What are the prospects for adopting new CCB degrees in specific occupations in the six Great Lakes states?
- What are the implications for scaling CCB degrees in the six Great Lakes states?

RESEARCH METHODS

We conducted one or more interviews with state agency leaders (higher education and community college) in six Great Lakes states between spring and fall 2019. Based on the initial interviews, we conducted additional interviews with state leaders in Ohio due to this state's recent adoption of CCB degrees. Our interest in this state reflected our desire to learn about the policy-borrowing research that state leaders had done to help formulate state policy on CCB degrees. We sought to understand the decision-making that state leaders employed to establish program approval expectations and procedures that were directed at connecting CCBS to regional and college workforce development strategies.

In addition, we conducted a supply and demand study that involved gathering occupational supply and demand information in the six Great Lakes states for the following four occupational categories: business management and related occupations, software development, early childhood education, and registered nursing. These occupational areas represent key program categories in two states that offer CCB degrees at scale (Florida and Washington) and appear to be relevant to labor markets in one or more Great Lakes states.

For each occupational area and each Great Lakes state, we analyzed labor market, program enrollment and baccalaureate degree completion data, including Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) occupational demand and annual wage data. The specific elements include:

- BLS occupational projections data for 2016-2026, including total projected vacancies, annual vacancies and projected growth rates.
- BLS occupational hourly wage estimates for 2019 (most recent year).
- Annual baccalaureate degree conferral data for six-digit Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) codes from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), or from the state postsecondary education agency website, if available. An average of the most recent two years of baccalaureate degree conferrals

for all higher education institutions (public, independent, and for-profit) was used for this analysis.

STATUS OF CCB DEGREES IN GREAT LAKES STATES

Figure 1 shows the status of CCB degrees in the six Great Lakes states. Briefly, the results of our research from the national landscape study, as well as supplemental information gathered from our interviews with state leaders in the six Great Lakes states show a fairly unique status for each state. Indiana authorized Vincennes University to confer a form of CCB degree in 2004. Michigan adopted CCB degrees in 2012 when all community colleges were authorized to confer CCB degrees, but the degrees can only be offered in energy production, concrete technology, maritime technology, and culinary arts. To date, six of Michigan's 28 public community

colleges confer one or more of these degrees. All Ohio community colleges could potentially be authorized to confer CCB degrees once their application is approved by the Chancellor through an approval process that prohibits program duplication by universities (public or private) in the region. To date, the state has approved six colleges to confer nine applied baccalaureate degree programs. The Minnesota legislature and Minnesota Board of Trustees granted Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College authority to confer a baccalaureate degree in indigenous elementary education, but no degrees have been awarded so far. In 2018, the University of Wisconsin (UW) System aligned the 13 two-year UW college campuses with seven comprehensive campuses, and this meant the state is no longer counted among the nation's CCB states (Soler, 2019). Lastly, legislators in Illinois have introduced several bills to authorize community colleges to confer Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN) degrees but thus far, none of these state authorizing laws have passed.

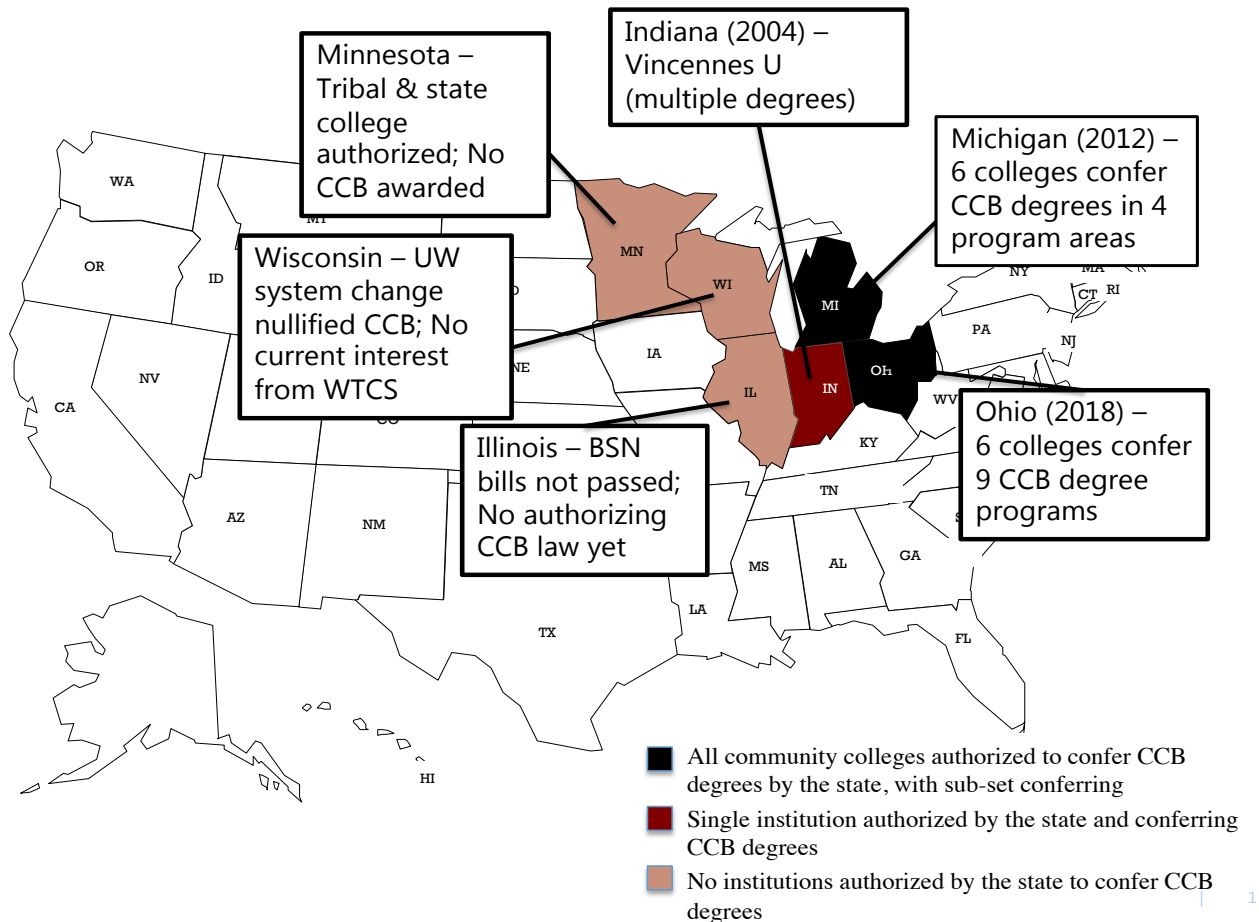


Figure 1. The status of CCB degrees in the six Great Lakes states.

PERCEPTIONS OF GREAT LAKES LEADERS

Our interviews with Great Lakes leaders about CCB degrees reveal they understand that these credentials are one of many policy responses to grow baccalaureate degrees in their states. Generally Great Lakes leaders hold favorable views toward CCB degrees but they have questions. They understand these degrees could contribute to their state college completion agendas, but they are unsure how much. Not knowing how many degrees are conferred in states that have adopted CCB programs leads to uncertainty about where to rank CCB policies among the various college completion policy options. Also, in considering state policy on CCBs and college completion, some leaders compare CCB degrees to transfer and articulation arrangements, wondering if they supplement or compete with transfer. Moreover, some Great Lakes leaders see university centers as performing a similar role to CCB degrees in terms of increasing access to bachelor's degrees for community college students through partnerships between 2-year and 4-year institutions.

Having asked Great States leaders to respond to our questions about the higher education policy landscape, we turned our attention to the workforce. Our questions explored the leaders' perceptions of potential relationships between CCB degrees and workforce and economic development policies. Whether stronger connections between CCBs and state workforce and economic development would help overcome barriers to adoption of these credentials was an open question. In essence, would CCB degrees be more attractive to states if the case for adopting them was rooted in quantitative workforce data?

Our interviews with the Great Lakes leaders revealed that they recognize the potential contribution that CCBs could make to enabling colleges to be more responsive to employer skill needs in their states. Most are also aware that making the case for state adoption of CCB programs requires planning and leveraging industry advocates. Documenting a demand for workers with bachelor's degrees in critical sectors is important to state leaders, but this research is not straightforward and competes with other priorities.

Finally with respect to our interviews with leaders of the six Great Lakes states, we pursued additional discussions with higher education leaders in Ohio, the most recent state to authorize CCB degrees in the Midwest. Our interviews documented how Ohio navigated CCB program approval processes with workforce needs to demonstrate to multiple constituencies, especially 4-year universities, that there is adequate demand to justify state approval of these credentials. Even so, Ohio leaders were frank about their experience with CCB degrees being recent and limited, with only two years of time. They were candid about the importance of learning through state and local experience with adoption of CCB degrees, including the importance of strengthening partnerships between the state's higher education and workforce and economic development entities as foundational to scaling more CCB degrees.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND RESULTS

Looking at the five selected occupational categories, demand for business management and related occupations is greater than bachelor's degree supply in every state. Across the region, among business management and related occupations, marketing managers have the highest hourly earnings, and market research analysts have the strongest projected growth, but the lowest hourly earnings. In Illinois, business management occupational demand is more than two times annual bachelor's degree conferrals.

The supply/demand picture for registered nurses (RNs) is important to consider, given that RNs have high hourly earnings, and strong projected growth in some states. In Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin, RN demand exceeds the bachelor's degree supply by a substantial amount. In Indiana and Minnesota, supply and demand is in balance. In Illinois, supply exceeds demand, noting about two-thirds of nursing bachelor's degrees are supplied by independent for-profit institutions. A single institution, Chamberlain College of Nursing, accounts for all of the for-profit output.

Demand for software developers is greater than bachelor's degree supply in every state other than

Table 1. Projected Annual Vacancies as a Percent of Annual Degree Conferrals

Occupations	Illinois	Indiana	Michigan	Minnesota	Ohio	Wisconsin
Business Management (& related)	151.3	13.5	27.2	96.1	64.8	70.3
Registered Nurses	(22.3)	8.4	161.1	13.8	29.7	47.7
Software Developers	20.5	(37.1)	6.2	21.3	134.3	14.2
Early Childhood Education	550.9	414.0	746.8	480.4	49.4	606.8

Indiana. In Ohio, software developer demand is more than two times annual bachelor's degree conferrals, and across the Great Lakes states, software developers garner high hourly earnings and very high projected growth rates.

Demand for Early Childhood Educators (ECE) far exceeds the annual supply of bachelor's degree-holders in this field in every state. In fact, Ohio is the only state in which large numbers of these degrees are conferred annually. A persistent concern about ECE jobs, however, is that they yield lower hourly earnings despite their strong projected growth in most states.

Table 1 summarizes these findings in terms of prospects for the CCB degree in the six Great Lakes states and the four occupational areas. Business management (and related occupations) and ECE are two areas that show projected annual vacancies as a percent of annual degree conferral in all six states. The gaps are largest in business management in Illinois and all states except Ohio in ECE. All states except Indiana show a gap in software developers, with an especially large gap in Ohio.

Finally, the gap between projected annual vacancies and percent annual degree conferral is also large in registered nursing in Michigan, with a more modest gap in four other states (IN, MN, OH, and WI). Illinois' data on registered nursing is more nuanced as there appears to be no gap; however, the analysis shows the reason for an oversupply of registered nurses is a large number of graduates from a single for-profit institution. Were this institution omitted from the analysis to look

at RN graduates of public and non-profit institutions, the picture would look much different.

SUMMARY

Great Lakes state leaders recognize CCB degrees are one of several college completion policies that could increase access and potentially address equity gaps in baccalaureate attainment. However, perceived barriers to CCB degrees raise concerns among higher education leaders in the Great Lakes states about how high to prioritize these credentials. They understand the potential of CCB degrees to develop the workforce in critical skill shortage areas like business, healthcare, information technology, and education, and they also understand that the students who participate in CCBs are unlikely to pursue other bachelor's options. Even so, the lack of detailed information about these degrees (how many are conferred and what degree programs are thriving in CCB-adopting states) contributes to a cautionary approach to adoption.

Attempting to fill this void in information about CCB degree adoption and implementation, our supply and demand analysis identified occupations in the six Great Lakes states where bachelor's-prepared employees are needed. Whether results such as these help to clarify and possibly strengthen the case for CCBs is unknown but will continue to be part of our efforts to strengthen research and development on CCB degrees in the United States.

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