

Community colleges have long offered a variety of workforce-oriented programs intended to help students gain skills and knowledge for a specific career or occupation. Among these are short-term credentials, ranging from 5-14 weeks in duration, designed to teach students a specific skillset related to an occupation – often in response to local labor market needs.

Types of short-term credentials can include certificate programs and industry-recognized credentials. These programs target a variety of industries from information technology to allied healthcare. CUNY Queensborough Community College developed a [Cloud Computing Micro-credential](#) that takes 8 - 12 weeks to complete and leads to a career as an Entry-level Cloud Engineer. Pima Community College developed [8 FastTrack micro-credential pathways](#) featuring emergency medical services, advanced manufacturing, and automotive technician programs that can be completed in as little as 12 weeks.

[The recent rise of micro-credentials](#) has increased the demand for community colleges to offer more short-term workforce programs. According to data from National Center for Education Statistics, the number of certificates below the associate degree level conferred by public institutions increased from approximately 520,000 in the 2010-11 academic year to [696,000 in the 2020-21 academic year](#).

For community colleges specifically, over [40% of students](#) are enrolled in non-credit programs. The average tuition cost for short-term programs at public institutions is [\\$7,000](#), yet Pell Grant eligible students currently cannot use Pell Grant funds to cover costs for programs shorter than 15 weeks. This restriction reinforces financial barriers for low-income students wishing to upskill themselves and could discourage students from pursuing in-demand workforce training programs. Extending Pell eligibility to short-term workforce programs has been a top priority for community colleges over the last several years and there is growing support in Congress to help rectify this issue.

In the 117th Congress, Short-Term Pell, also known as Workforce Pell, came remarkably close to becoming law with bipartisan language in the American COMPETES Act, but was ultimately left out in the Conference Committee process. Thus far, three separate bills in support of Workforce Pell have been introduced in the 118th Congress. Two of the bills would establish economic value-measures and set a bar for program eligibility. According to a recent Urban Institute report, [81% of programs offered by public institutions](#) would pass the requirements outlined in the PELL Act.

- Senators Kaine (D) and Braun (R) and Representatives Johnson (R), Blunt-Rochester (D), Turner (R), and Sherrill (D) introduced the Jumpstarting Our Businesses by Supporting Students (JOBS) Act in January 2023. The text of the bill can be found [here](#) and a summary can be found [here](#).
- Chairwoman Foxx (R) and Representative Stefanik (R) introduced their own version called the Promoting Employment and Lifelong Learning (PELL) Act. The text of the bill can be found [here](#) and a summary can be found [here](#).
- In March 2023, Ranking Member Bobby Scott (D) introduced the Jobs to Compete Act. The text of the bill can be found [here](#) and the fact sheet can be found [here](#).

We have included a detailed bill comparison on the three bills below.

Bill Comparison:

JOBS Act	PELL Act	Jobs to Compete Act
Between 150-600 clock hours of instruction time and 8-15 weeks in overall program duration.	Between 150-600 clock hours of instruction time and 8-15 weeks in overall program duration.	Between 150-600 clock hours of instruction time and 8-15 weeks in overall program duration.
Allows for (but does not require) that an eligible program be provided via an “eligible career pathway” program.	Adds completion and placement requirements (70% job placement rate, 70% completion rate).	Adds value-added earnings requirements and completion/ placement requirements (70% job placement rate, 70% completion rate).
This bill does not have any earning metrics.	<p>Total cost of the program cannot exceed the value-added earnings measure of program completers receiving federal financial aid.</p> <p>This would be calculated using median earnings data 3 years post program completion and would be adjusted using local/ state data and compared to 150% of the federal poverty line (currently \$21,870).</p>	<p>Must demonstrate students who complete the program receive a median increase of 20% of the</p> <p>median earnings of students prior to enrolling in a program. As well as that students who complete the program have median earnings greater than the median earnings of students with a high school diploma or GED in the state.</p>
Programs apply directly to the Department of Education for eligibility.	Programs would not apply directly to the Department of Education for eligibility, instead eligibility is determined by accreditors.	Programs apply directly to the Department of Education for eligibility.
Excludes for-profits institutions of higher education.	Includes all institutions of higher education, including for-profits.	Includes all institutions of higher education, including for-profits
Exclusively online programs do not qualify for Workforce Pell	Exclusively online programs may qualify for Workforce Pell	Exclusively online programs do not qualify for Workforce Pell
Directs the Secretary of USED to establish a data-sharing agreement with the Secretary of USDOL to ensure access to the data necessary to report on core performance accountability measures within WIOA. NCES would “collect and review” contents of ETP reports annually.	Required Dept. of Education to collect, verify, and publicly publish program data (including % of students employed after 2 quarters of completion, completion rate, % of completers who after 3 years have a median salary that exceeds 150% of the poverty line).	Create a data sharing agreement between the Department of Labor and Department of Education to share outcome metrics data.

For more on Workforce Pell, stakeholders are encouraged to review ACCT’s [The Value of Community College Short-Term Credentials](#) report, and the Department of Education’s report following their [Short-Term Pell pilot programs](#).