Remarks to the Workforce Information Advisory Council public meeting on September 10, 2020 delivered by Kyle Albert, Assistant Research Professor, George Washington Institute of Public Policy at George Washington University.

**Background on the NCRN**

* The Non-Degree Credentials Research Network is a community of academics (faculty and doctoral students) and researchers in the policy/think-tank world with an interest in what we describe as non-degree credentials, though the names “sub-baccalaureate credentials” and “alternative credentials” are sometimes used. Credentials of interest to our members include, but are not limited to, certifications, licenses, certificates (credit and non-credit), apprenticeships, bootcamps, badges, nano and micro degrees, and so on…
* We held three meetings at GWU before COVID hit, and have hosted a roughly twice-monthly webinar series since April. We are hoping to hold another in-person meeting at GW in March 2021, COVID permitting.
* We have 73 researchers and 97 stakeholder members. We’re happy to relay any relevant inquires or announcements to our email lists, or help the Council identify researchers to partner with for specific needs.
* We are supported by a grant from the Lumina Foundation. We are coming to the end of a two year grant cycle in February 2021 and, in advance of the conclusion of this cycle, we are preparing a final report outlining the state of the field and proposing an agenda for further research on non-degree credentials.
* Our members have diverse interests, but the majority of our members are in some way, shape or form interested in the potential for non-degree credentials to translate into better labor market outcomes.

**Forthcoming NCRN Report**

* As noted above, the NCRN will be releasing a report in the coming months. We have prepared a draft, which is currently being reviewed by our members. We hope to have a version of the report posted to the NCRN website.
* A section of our report will deal with the public data infrastructure supporting non-degree credentials research. Many of our members use microdata published by the federal government, such as the Adult Training and Education Survey and the Current Population Survey. Interest is growing in other datasets, including the Participant Individual Record Layout data files published by the Employment and Training Administration.
* Our members recognize that tremendous progress has been made over the past decade in assembling the sorts of datasets that allow us to evaluate the labor market value of credentials. However, blind spots still exist; for example, we tend to lack detail on the field of study pursued by individuals who get a non-degree credential. More often than not, the surveys that followed from the work of the Interagency Working Group on Expanded Measures of Enrollment and Attainment treat credential attainment as a binary measure in which one has a credential or one does not.
* A central challenge we see in the development of the next generation of surveys is the accurate measurement of skills. We note that government datasets tend to focus on the attainment of credentials and not underlying skills. Work needs to be done to develop better measures of skills.
* We also note that some states have made promising progress in the development of longitudinal data systems that provide an administrative linkage between credential attainment and earnings data. The problem here is coverage of non-degree credentials, including certifications issued by national certification organizations. While Workcred is experiencing some real breakthroughs in its outreach to certification bodies to encourage participation in data linkage projects, many certification bodies are not providing the data that could help us identify a causal relationship between earning a credential and career advancement.
* Academic researchers by in large want to partner with agencies and organizations with access to quality data, but struggle to identify and negotiate access to appropriate datasets.
* Our report may also mention that there is a shortage of funding opportunities for research projects that are not evaluative in nature. Over the past few years we seem to have lost two of the grant programs that were popular with university-based researchers in workforce development, namely the DOL Scholars Program and the Labor Research and Evaluation Grants program. We would like to see DOL return to funding more “fundamental” R&D in this area to supplement its investments in evaluating the effectiveness of current programs.