

GEMEnA EXPERT PANEL MEETING SUMMARY

NOVEMBER 1, 2012

MEETING OVERVIEW

The Interagency Working Group on Expanded Measures of Enrollment and Attainment (GEMEnA) brought together a panel of experts to provide input on the four strands of the group's work:

- Deploy a core set of survey items related to the prevalence and key characteristics of industry-recognized certifications and occupational licenses;
- Develop and deploy a core set of survey items related to the prevalence and key characteristics of subbaccalaureate educational certificates;
- Consider new and revised measures of participation in education and training designed to prepare out-of-school youth and adults for work; and
- Support NCES in the development of a new household study on education, training, and credentials for work.

The main purpose of the panel meeting was to obtain expert input on the research and policy questions related to credential attainment and participation in education and training that federal measures should help answer. Other goals were to develop a better understanding of the methodological and substantive issues involved in conducting research on these topics, and of the language used in the field to represent the types of credentials, education, and training the group is trying to measure.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The following sections summarize the panels' feedback on the results of GEMEnA's pilot test of the Adult Training and Education Survey and input on the first three strands of GEMEnA's work.

The Adult Training and Education Survey (ATES) Pilot

- The main certification item appears valid for measuring the prevalence of certifications/licenses in the US adult population and is worthy of being deployed, although it is recommended that the team to do some checks against administrative data sources
 - The Princeton Data Improvement Initiative (PDII) conducted similar checks and found some overreporting of credentials
- The certificate items need additional development
 - Our definition of "certificate" may have led the seeded sample institutions to think that certificates of complete record were appropriate to include; panel members noted that institutions may believe that these "certificates" have value, because they enable credit transfer between institutions
- There is also a boundary issue, in general, with measuring certificates; which types have value and are important to measure?

- E.g., on-the-job certificates, work readiness certificates for out-of-school youth, office skills, occupational safety, etc.
- It would be ideal to measure all types of certificates to determine which have value; however, GEMEnA will not be able to measure all forms initially; for now the focus is on certificates earned through programs of study (i.e., through a postsecondary institution) at the subbaccalaureate level
- Lack of salience of credentials—in particular, for reporting certificates—among older and unemployed respondents may not be an important issue, if what we care about is capturing the credentials that respondents are actually using for their job
- Intensity of participation in education for credentials is important but difficult to measure
 - Given that certificates are variously measured in credits and contact hours (and respondents do not always able to differentiate these), the group will have to be judicious in its attempts to measure intensity of participation, although this type of measure is considered high priority if feasible
- Terminology issue: The term “for work” is used by the group in association with education and training, but all postsecondary education could be considered “for work.” It may be more accurate to use the term “for occupations.”

Strand 1: Deploy Measures of Certifications and Licenses

- What is the value in collecting national vs. local level data on these credentials and employment outcomes? Federal surveys are good for collecting “big picture” and more in-depth (e.g. “why”) information for federal policy and research purposes. Federal data sources could also, however, play a role in making the labor market work more efficiently by providing information for local decision making. For example, students do not know the market for a particular program, and employers do not know the distribution of credentials within the labor pool in potential new business locations. Through connections with state or local data—e.g. federal unemployment insurance wage records aggregated to the state level, and local level data from state longitudinal data systems—as well as real-time data sources (e.g., job ads), micro data sets could be created to help us improve our understanding of the role of local labor markets and the alignment of labor markets and participation in education and training (supply and demand). The panel recognized that a local focus may not be feasible for federal data collections at this stage, however.
- A related issue that affects analysis of the relationship between getting the education and training and getting jobs is restriction on the supply side. For example, states may limit the number of licenses issued in a field, and may not recognize licenses issued by other states. This would be a factor in any analysis of the relationship between licensing and outcomes. For this reason, it is important to distinguish between licenses and certifications in a survey. Another restriction on supply is due to military credentials not being accepted towards licensure requirements. Similarly, supply becomes even more restricted as a result of “credential creep” in occupations—as more and more jobs require licensure, more demand is created for a limited pool of licenses. These restrictions all limit human capital.

- There is a mismatch in the labor market between the skills actually required for the work and the educational levels being attained. What industry is looking for is a demonstration of competency, not educational attainment per se. This is why certification and licensure have a strong signaling value, but employers are also accepting educational attainment as a surrogate for measuring skills. However, at the subbaccalaureate level, the “whys” are very important; i.e., the credentials with value are those that demonstrate skill that is directly relevant to the work. Only individuals (through surveys) can provide this deeper type of information.
- An employer survey to measure “demand” is not necessary if we can get (1) whether a credential makes someone employable (gets him or her a job); (2) earnings; and (3) whether a person is working in field. These data would reflect the voice of the employer.
- There may be a role for program data, such as credential awards made through WIA-funded programs (e.g., to reflect work readiness).
- There is a lot of churn in the labor market. Credentials can become outdated quickly, and people get new credentials and training to keep up, which has implications for policy research. For this reason, it is important to know when a credential was earned.
- However, it is not possible to measure pathways or an unlimited list of credentials on a survey. The priority should therefore be to decide how to ask about the credentials considered most important by the respondent for their job.
- Other high priority areas for certification and license measurement not state above included:
 - Getting more information about the “how,” how long, and “where” (providers) of training leading to credential attainment.
 - A focus on STEM fields.
 - Determining whether respondents are working in the field of their training. This will require occupation-level data; industry-level information is not specific enough.

Strand 2: Develop and Deploy Measures of Certificates

- It would be good to have a mapping done of certificates to occupations; however, the Employment & Training Administration (ETA) has tried to do this in the past and found that it varied too much from state to state.
- The Department of Defense (DoD) has a lot of data on these types of credentials and training; the group may want to approach them.
- Whether or not apprentices are registered makes a big difference in their salaries; registered apprentices make less because of the Davis-Bacon Act. (This Act allows employers to pay apprentices at a lower rate than other workers in the occupation.)
- It would be good to ask more about the supports and barriers experienced in participating in education and training.
- It would be useful to get qualitative (cognitive interview) data from a wider range of skilled trades (e.g., electricians) and health occupations (e.g., EMTs).

Strand 3: Consider New and Revised Measures of Enrollment and Participation in Education and Training

- Feedback on issues raised in the noncredit background paper included
 - It will be a challenge to determine where to draw the line in what is considered “education and training for work.” For example, You Tube has “job training” videos—is this in scope? Also, many adult basic education and youth development programs have a job training component. Would this be included? The group will have to evaluate what all is possible to measure and differentiate during development and testing under Strands 3 and 4.
 - Continuing education units are called by many names, and will be difficult to capture on a survey. However, these units do seem to have “currency” due to the continuing education requirements of many certifications and licenses, so they may be important to try to measure.
 - An emerging issue is assessment of prior learning for the purpose of awarding credits or credentials. A related issue is the conversion of military training into civilian credits or credentials. With the increasing diversity in routes to credentials and demonstrations of skill attainment, it is possible that credits will not be as meaningful in the future.
Apprenticeships are important to measure, whether they are registered or not; they represent a small proportion of the labor market, but are key pathways in certain occupations.
- High priorities under Strand 3 include determining:
 - Who is paying for education and training?
 - Where is public money coming in?
 - Can we find better intervention points? Who is moving through the system and what does that tell us about how we’re functioning?
 - What does the education and training consist of?
 - Who are the providers, and how is that changing over time?
 - Who “safeguards” the occupations and how do they do so? (e.g., by requiring ongoing CEUs)
 - What are the returns to all stakeholders? (what education and training has “currency”?)
 - How portable is the education and training?
 - What role do education and training play in building a meaningful career in an occupation? (e.g., stackable credentials)
 - How can we measure skill development—time in learning is one measure; some panel members prefer direct measures of skills; others noted private measures such as ratings on Angie’s list.
 - Increasingly, people use on-line “modules”, demonstrations, and other information for just-in-time learning. Should this be captured in our measures? More generally, we need to know who instructional providers are and how they are changing over time.

- The lines between occupational education and remedial education are being blurred in models like Washington State's I-BEST program (where students get developmental education embedded in occupational education).
- Although apprenticeships have federal policy interest, they are very small in number and an over-emphasis on these may mis-represent their use/importance as a learning method.
- It was noted that there is no national consensus on the importance of workforce education (in spite of the current focus on it due to the recession), as evidenced by the hodge-podge of federal, state and local policies and lower funding for community college occupational programs than academic programs. All of which suggests the need to show the value of (returns to) occupational education for individuals and society. State policymakers are very interested in this to help drive state economic development strategies and investments.
- Need to consider role of longitudinal versus cross-sectional data for getting at some of these issues; e.g., NLS-Y may be better for documenting returns to education and training. (Should some of our questions go on NLS-Y?)
- It was noted that some existing NCES longitudinal surveys (high school and postsecondary longitudinal surveys) have early drafts of some of our questions, and we can analyze these in the next couple of years
- It was noted that we need to keep in mind that the ultimate question is not “what would we like to know” but “what can we get good data on”—make sure we do not sacrifice data quality for data quantity.
- Other relevant data efforts we should know about: (1) Census Bureau's local employment records program; this includes a jobs-to-jobs flow tool so that one can track e.g., where people who were construction workers in 2008 ended up in 2012, and (2) Workforce Data Quality Campaign, which is working to incorporate workforce data into SLDS, and how to improve workforce data in general.

A final brainstorming session led the panel through an activity to identify the top 3 to 5 questions each panelist would ask a worker about the education and training he or she participated in to get a job. The resulting set of questions is provided in the Attachment.

Strand 4. Support NCES in the development of a new household study on education, training, and credentials for work.

Panel members were apprised of the on-going National Adult Training and Education Survey (NATES) response rate pilot test. They had no substantive comments on this work, other than some clarification questions.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

Panel members were given a “homework assignment”: Make the case for putting one or more of the tested certification/licensing items on a federal household survey, keeping in mind the five “Ps”: Place (geography), power, periodicity, parsimony, and priority. Our interest is in which items are best placed in which surveys.

Next steps will be for NCES, in consultation with GEMEnA, to operationalize the important measurement constructs identified by the panel, conduct focus groups to get more information on the correct language to use in survey items, develop and test items in cognitive interviews, and conduct a pilot test of a new survey. The pilot test will test both new certificate questions and new “participation in education and training” questions; it may also test new or revised certification and licensing questions. The expert panel will meet again next fall, but the group may seek panelists’ input during the year.

Attachment:

Priority Questions on Participation in Education and Training

1. Over the last 3 [or 1] year(s), how much time doing on-the-job training and noncredit courses?***¹
2. What education or training did you need to get your first job, keep or move up in your field, or for your current job?*
3. Has your short career been via a path, that is, a planned course of education or training that has been useful? Describe the path.
4. What kinds of training did you participate in?
5. How or why did you decide to go to the noncredit program? Were you referred?
6. Describe your most recent work experience and tell me 3 skills you were able to enhance.
7. Which of the following education and training awards have you received? Mark all that apply.*
8. Have you received some form of training, and what career-related skills did you learn?
9. If you provide a service, can you give me access to Angie's list or some other place that provides an evaluation of your work?
10. Have you gone to school at all since high school?
11. What do you believe the impact of participating in the courses has been or will be on your work? (employability, wages, level promotion, job satisfaction, i.e., reward)**
12. Did you need a certification or license, or a certificate to get or keep this job or to move up?***
13. Have you experienced barriers to your learning? How have you dealt with them?
14. Where did you go to get that training? Who provided it? List of providers.**
15. Were you able to complete your training at one institution? How long did it take you?***
16. Did your current employer require certain credentials?
17. How did you get those skills?
18. Who are you? Age, earnings, gender, employment status.
19. Show me a portfolio of your work.
20. Did school after high school lead to a diploma or certificate?
21. Who paid for you to get your training and credential? Self, employer, government, grant* (multiple funders) How much did it cost?
22. How well have training programs served your learning? Have you developed skills that you have used in your career?
23. Did you have to take an exam?
24. Enumerate your trainings.
25. How do you know you achieved X?
26. What is your field of study? (most recent)*
27. What additional training do you need to achieve industry recognition?
28. Can you do the work you are applying for? Explain.
29. How do you keep records of all the education and training you have done?
30. To what extent are you making decisions about your training on your own or getting advice?
31. How did you get the training? Online, community college?
32. What role has technology played in your education and career?
33. Purpose and motivation?
34. Do they have to retake courses?
35. If you could have done it differently how would you have done it?*
36. What is your occupation? Are you working in your field of study?
37. What documentation were you provided to demonstrate successful completion?

¹ Each asterisk represents an additional panelist who asked the question.

38. References?
39. Have you worked with the employment service?
40. Have you received employer training?