



Independent Colleges of Washington
Better Together: Partners in Student Success for 60 Years

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Community and technical colleges and four-year universities join forces to advance nursing profession

OLYMPIA -- In a move to boost the number of nurses with bachelor's degrees in Washington, the community and technical college system and four-year universities have reached a landmark agreement to create a shorter, smoother process for students to achieve the degree. A new statewide Associate in Nursing transfer agreement standardizes the way credits are awarded and accepted between and among Washington's community and technical colleges and four-year universities.

Students who earn an associate degree in nursing from a participating community or technical college and pass the registered nurse license exam may enter Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs as seniors rather than as juniors, trimming up to a year off the path to a bachelor's degree in nursing.

Associate transfer degrees typically place students at the junior level, but the agreement recognizes that community and technical college students already have a head start on their general education requirements because of the tough prerequisites needed for competitive admission into their own community or technical college nursing programs.

Proponents said the agreement paves the way for registered nurses to earn bachelor's degrees in nursing, move up in their careers, and meet the needs of the fast-evolving health care industry.

"We're finding that more and more health care employers are requiring bachelor's degrees," said Michelle Andreas, South Puget Sound Community College vice president for instruction and past State Board for Community and Technical Colleges staff member. "This agreement will help meet those needs and give registered nurses a greater chance at career advancement."

The new transfer agreement dovetails with the national Institute of Medicine's call to have 80 percent of nurses hold bachelor's degrees by 2020. The institute's goal is to prepare the nursing profession for the greater responsibilities and increased complexity of the health care system.

Jane Sherman, associate director for academic policy for the Council of Presidents, the organization representing four-year public colleges and universities, credited the nursing profession for pushing for the transfer agreement.

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“As health care demands rise, many employers are expecting nursing education to increase too,” said Sherman. “The health care industry is shifting toward demand for higher credentials. Here in Washington, the nursing profession, community and technical colleges and four-year universities stepped up with the most collaborative and creative effort I’ve seen here or anywhere.”

While two-year and four-year colleges and universities have supported nursing transfer agreements since 1999, this agreement creates a much more efficient and consistent statewide practice among all public, and most of the private, colleges and universities that offer RN-to-BSN (Registered Nurse-to-Bachelor of Science in Nursing) completion degrees.

“This is all about giving students the most efficient route to a Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing and strengthening our health care system,” said Mary Baroni, a professor and former director of nursing and health studies (2002-2011) at the University of Washington Bothell. “After more than two years of hard work hammering out this agreement, we couldn’t be more pleased with the outcome.”

Community and technical colleges that plan to make use of the agreement are now working to ensure their programs align to the new transfer pathway.

“This is a terrific example of the way Washington transfer works. When a problem is identified, the colleges work together to solve it by thinking creatively together in order to respond to the students’ and the state’s needs,” said Violet Boyer, president and CEO of the Independent Colleges of Washington.

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