

**Accelerated Degree Program Work Group**  
**August 3, 2016**  
**2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

**Conference Call**

**Attendees:**

Bernadette Jungblut – CWU, Janet Hubbard – EWU, Scott Coleman – Evergreen, Emily Leggio- UW, Steve VanderStaay – WWU, Joe Holliday – SBCTC, Tracy Hall – Evergreen, John Neace - EWU, Chris Mulick – WSU, Trudes Tango – Counsel House Higher Education Committee, Evan Klein – Counsel Senate Higher Education Committee and Julie Garver – COP

**Discussion of Competency-Based and Course Reduction Models**

COP provided the Work Group with a summary of institutional accelerated degree pathway programs across the nation. The majority of the programs were structured as either Prior Learning Credit Model programs or Compression Model programs. There were a few Competency-Based Model programs and no Course Reduction Model programs.

Course Reduction Models

There are no Course Reduction Model programs readily known in the U.S. Southern Oregon University markets its Accelerated Baccalaureate program (a.k.a. Acc Bacc) as one that “actually reduces the number of credits required for graduation”<sup>1</sup> but adds that a reduction in credits is possible because the degree program takes into account a student’s high school work.

Competency-Based Model Programs

In Washington, Western Governors University is the leader in competency-based higher education. Central Washington University (CWU) as well as a consortium of thirteen community and technical colleges also offer competency-based programs.

CWU’s program, currently in its third year, is offered through the Information Technology and Administrative Management (ITAM) department. The FlexIt Competency-Based Bachelor of Science program offers two specializations one in Administrative Management and the other in Retail Management and Technology. All of the coursework in the degree program is online. Degree completion is the goal of the program. To be eligible for the program a student must either enroll with a Direct Transfer Agreement degree or have completed their general education if they are not a transfer student.

Bernadette Jungblut shared several best practices identified in the development and implementation of CWU’s program:

- The program offers a flat tuition/fee rate of \$6,000 for six months. A student can complete as much coursework that he/she can accomplish within the six months. There are no additional fees and includes books and other course materials. The rate is the same for resident and non-resident students.
- The program offers a flexible start date. A student can start the program anytime and is only assessed the tuition/fee rate when the student registers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://inside.sou.edu/abp/index.html>

- Each student is assigned a faculty mentor from the ITAM department. The mentor offers advising and assists students with determining the appropriate course load and pace for the student.
- The program's design requires cross training among institutional departments, including ITAM, financial aid, registrar and other student services. In addition, there are monthly meetings of faculty mentors, student services, registrar, student accounts, financial aid, and academic and student support teams to talk about students and their progress.

Jungblut shared that the average completion time is approximately two years. Students who completed sooner tended to be students who have flexible employment or are getting some type of employment/workforce assistance funding. She noted that CWU's program is completely self-supported and cautioned about the expenses of bringing a competency-based program online, including the associated costs to develop and implement marketing and public relations campaigns. She underscored that in order for the return on investment to be positive, competency-based programs must be viewed as a long-term investment, not a short-term fix. She also noted that educating students and employers about the competency-based program and its benefits continues to be a work in progress.

Washington's community and technical colleges offer a competency-based program in Business Transfer. The program is a multi-college associate degree program that includes thirteen colleges in the consortium. The consortium is led by Columbia Basin College, which also serves as the primary institution for student services such as financial aid. Tacoma Community College is also implementing the program and the remaining 11 colleges are coming online to the program one at a time. The program requires strong prior learning credit from students and may more accurately be described as a hybrid of prior learning credit and competency-based models.

Joe Holliday, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, echoed the best practices shared by Jungblut and added the following:

- Value of multiple institutions working together to deliver the program.
- Students can work at their own pace
- Program works well for place, time and pace bound students

### **Discussion of Accelerated Degree Pathways and Graduate and Professional Programs**

COP provided a broad overview of accelerated graduate/professional programs. In general, accelerated graduate/professional programs mirror similar undergraduate/graduate splits currently offered in Washington. Instead of the traditional four-year undergraduate and two-year masters program, accelerated programs generally offer a 3/2 split, with a three-year undergraduate and two-year graduate program; at the end of which a student earns both a bachelors and masters degree. In Washington, for example, Washington State University offers pre-pharmacy and pre-veterinary medicine students the opportunity to pursue a seven-year fast track B.S. Biochemistry – Pharm.D. program or B.S. Microbiology to DVM program.

In addition, the Work Group discussed how accelerated degree programs at the undergraduate level align with graduate/professional programs. COP shared that for the most part there is little concern, primarily because the accelerated degree programs still meet the 180/120 credit limits. In fact when students are asked why they pursue accelerated degree pathways the decision to pursue graduate/professional education beyond the bachelors degree is cited. The accelerated pathway

provides students with the opportunity to complete a bachelor degree and move on more quickly to a graduate/professional program. However, as with any degree pathway, students are encouraged to work with graduate/professional programs to make sure their undergraduate work aligns with the program they wish to pursue. For example, some professional programs, in particular medical schools, prefer students do not take dual credits (i.e. AP, IB) to meet admission requirements and instead take the course at the college level.

### **Discussion of Accelerated Degree Program Student Demographics**

COP shared an overview of student demographics for the four accelerated degree program models. Data for the prior learning credit model is more common than for competency-based or compression model programs. Outcome data is also limited in similar ways. COP is working with ERDC on additional Washington-based data.

The Work Group discussed the role of accelerated degree pathways. The discussion cautioned that accelerated degree pathways are an opportunity for some students but may not be the best learning environment and pathway for all students. It is important that institutions work to ensure students are pursuing pathways that will allow them to meet their goals. There is concern that if unprepared students pursue an accelerated learning pathway it may negatively impact degree attainment. The Work Group cautioned about expansion and a one-size fits all for accelerated degree pathways.

### **Discussion of Challenges and Barriers for Accelerated Degree Programs**

COP provided a summary of challenges and barriers for accelerated degree programs identified in the research and literature. The Work Group discussed five major areas that pose a challenge for accelerated degree pathways.

- Resources: Funding to support programs and students who may not be able to afford some programs, such as dual credit. Sufficient resources to provide knowledgeable, efficient and sufficient advising, mentoring and other support services both in K-12 and postsecondary education.
- Financial Aid: Financial aid eligibility issues that may come into play such as program length, quality and frequency of instruction, length of the quarter and standard term schedules. Lack of year-round Pell funding and funding to fully support the State Need Grant. Concerns that high credit loads may exceed federal student loan limits. Impact on staff resources anytime a process has to be done outside of the “normal” functions often results in manual, case-by-case changes. Concerns about how programs would align with compensation programs for military students.
- Academic: Relatively new learning pedagogy. Concerns about accreditation requirements. Standardization of the 180/120 credit requirements for bachelor degrees. Coordination with other higher education sectors. Lack of academic flexibility (i.e. changing majors/double majoring). Potential for limited program offerings. May limit college experience including opportunities to study abroad or intern. Perception of quality. With regard to the STEM disciplines, these areas of study often require repetition. An increase in the number of students who need developmental math and development English Language. Concern that there is the chance that a two-tier system is developed. Lack of consistency in the transcription and evaluation of some prior learning credit.

- Institutional: May involve new institutional obligations that carry higher costs. Potential pressure on campus operations if changes are needed with regard to facilities, faculty contracts, and campus operations.
- Other: Advising and communication of pathways in K-12. Federal and state regulations. Work and family obligations.

### **Next Steps**

The Accelerated Degree Work Group will hold its fourth conference call on September 30 from 10:00-12:00. The Group will focus on the outline of the report and potential recommendations.

The Work Group agreed to come prepared to discuss potential recommendations to the Legislature.

Jungblut agreed to share a summary of the best practices for CWU's competency-based program and also a recent article regarding K-12 demographics.

COP will work with ERDC on data specific to Washington and share with the Work Group.