

Accelerated Degree Program Work Group

July 13, 2016

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Conference Call

Attendees:

Bernadette Jungblut – CWU, Janet Hubbard – EWU, Scott Coleman – Evergreen, Emily Leggio- UW, Mary Wack – WSU, Steve VanderStaay – WWU, Tracy Hall – Evergreen, John Neace - EWU, Chris Mulick – WSU, Senator Barbara Bailey – Chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee, Clint McCarthy –Coordinator/Analyst, James Crandall – Senate Majority Coalition Caucus, Cody Eccles – COP, and Julie Garver – COP

Introductions and Updates

Senator Barbara Bailey – Chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee- addressed the Work Group and shared her goal is to try and ensure that Washington’s public, four-year colleges and universities have a pathway that allows students to complete their degree goals in three-years. Understanding that opportunities currently exist, she hopes this work will lead to recommendations to strengthen the goal of providing more opportunities for students to finish their degree in three; saving time and money while providing the opportunity to move on to the workforce more quickly.

COP provided several updates for the Work Group. The Work Group added four additional members since the first meeting including a representative of the Financial Aid Directors, the Co-Chair of the Prior Learning Assessment Work Group for the baccalaureate sector, an institutional government relations officer and a representative from the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. In addition, the Work Group has scheduled monthly meetings via conference call for July through December.

Agendas, meeting summaries and resources along with the Work Group’s membership and charge can be found on COP’s [website](#).

Finally, COP provided an update and the website link to members of the House and Senate Higher Education Committees and staff.

Discussion of 180-quarter credit and 120-semester credit

COP provided the Work Group with a brief summary of the origins of the 180-quarter credit and 120-semester credit baccalaureate degree requirement. Though the history of this requirement is sparse, there is indication that it emerged in the early 20th century in response to the need for Harvard University to develop a structured process for students to follow to complete degree pathways.

Since then various accreditation bodies have addressed credit and degree policies for their regions. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), which is the accreditation body for Washington's public, baccalaureate institutions, does not have a specific policy requiring a particular number of credits for degrees. The Commission's Standards on educational programs does stipulate that programs will include the "appropriate content and rigor" for "collegiate- level degrees" and reflects, "generally accepted learning outcomes, norms or equivalences in higher education." Therefore, institutions and those seeking accreditation are aware that NWCCU considers 180-quarter credits and 120 semester credits as the norm in higher education for a baccalaureate degree.

In addition, some states have set credit limits in state statute either by credit hour or per the accrediting body. In Washington there is no state statute but Washington Administrative Code (WAC) [250-61-100 1\(b\)](#) specifically states, "a baccalaureate degree shall require at least one hundred eighty quarter credits or one hundred twenty semester credits."

Discussion of Framework for Accelerated Degree Programs

COP shared a framework for discussion around accelerated degree programs and the final report and recommendations. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities in their September 2012 policy brief *The Three-Year Bachelor's Degree: Reform Measure or Red Herring?* Identified four models for accelerated degree pathways.

- **Prior Learning Credit Model** - Includes dual credit and prior learning assessment as part of the baccalaureate pathway

- **Competency-Based Model** - Integrates course content across the curriculum, eliminates redundancy and assesses student knowledge and skills versus the use of a seat time model.
- **Course Reduction Model**- Reduces the number of credits required for a baccalaureate degree
- **Compression Model** - Condenses a baccalaureate degree program into three years with the integration of summer and inter-term courses.

The framework provides a way to structure the discussion that takes into account the multiple pathways institutions and states may establish to allow students to complete their degrees in less than the traditional time required.

The Work Group agreed to utilize the four-model framework to shape the Group's discussions and report and recommendations to the Legislature.

Discussion of How Other States and Institutions have Engaged in Accelerated Degree Programs

COP provided a broad overview of state and institutional policies and practices. The majority of states and institutions have developed accelerated degree pathways using the prior learning credit model. The compression model and competency-based models are less common and few institutions have explored the course reduction model. Washington's public, four-year institutions mirror other states with the primary accelerated degree pathway being the prior learning credit model followed by, though much more limited, the competency-based (CWU) and compression (EWU) models and no course reduction models. In addition, EWU and WSU both offer accelerated graduate programs, which allow students to complete their undergraduate and graduate degree in less time. The Work Group discussed their observation that where the pathways do exist, that students who take advantage of these programs are limited in terms of number and demographics.

In Washington for the graduating Class of 2014, those who entered directly from high school 6% completed their degree in three-years at Washington's public, baccalaureate institutions and 60% who transferred completed their degrees in three-years.

The Work Group discussed and inquired what was known about the

demographics of students that graduate in three-years. What are the demographics of the students, what do they study and what are the outcomes? COP will look into these questions and provide the Group with a summary at the August meeting.

Discussion of Institutional Best Practices

Nationally at the state and institutional level there is limited information on best practices. This is primarily due to the fact that accelerated degree pathways are still an emerging area within higher education. As Maria Tsuleff, author of *A Three-year Degree as a Trend in Higher Education* stated, “Although the three year degree is a growing trend here in the Western world, higher education is still figuring the best characteristics and benefits that this type of degree needs to have for undergraduate students.”

The best practices differ depending on the model for accelerated degree pathways. The prior learning credit and competency-based models have established best practices from years of implementation. Much less exists for the compression and course reduction models. What does emerge is the importance of institutional and/or sector led pathways and the importance of clear communication with students.

Next Steps

The Accelerated Degree Work Group will hold its third conference call on August 3 from 2:00-4:00 p.m. The Group will focus on identifying the challenges and obstacles that accelerated degree programs face.

The Work Group agreed to come prepared to discuss challenges and obstacles from their institutional perspective, including financial aid, transfer, and prior learning.

In addition, COP will follow-up and report to the Work Group on the following:

- The course reduction accelerated degree pathway from Southern Oregon University
- Demographic data, in general and if possible from Washington, for students who complete a bachelors degree in three-years, in particular student demographics, programs of study and outcomes.
- Accelerated Degree Pathways for graduate/professional programs