

Washington Community and Technical Colleges

Competency-Based Degrees

Work Group Recommendations

Endorsed by WACTC, March 2014

National Trends

- Strong enrollment response to new providers on online competency-based degrees offered by public and private non-profit colleges and universities.
- Recent U.S. Department of Education “Dear Colleague” letter requesting the use of federal financial aid for competency-based courses to further the desire to award aid based on content learned rather than time served.
- The US is falling behind other countries in college degree attainment among young adults. State and national policy makers believe our economic vitality and global competitiveness is tied to the strengths of a well-educated, knowledgeable, and skilled citizenry.
- Being middle-class in the U.S. requires increased educational attainment and degree completion among adults, including working adults. We cannot achieve our degree completion goals simply by focusing on recent high school graduates; we must also engage working adults whose time and place constraints are served best by eLearning.
- The expansion of eLearning nationally creates a competitive risk to our current market of 120,000 eLearning students, or 32,000 FTES, which constitute 20 percent of enrollments in our colleges.

College System Assets

Washington’s college system has a number of strengths that will support implementation of competency-based courses and degrees across the state.

1. Washington’s 34 community and technical colleges share a common information technology infrastructure for student demographic data; transcripts and financial aid; course data; subject disciplines and enrollments; personnel data and employment categories; and financial expenditures and revenues.
2. The college system has statewide transfer agreements with public and private non-profit colleges and universities, including major-specific transfer agreements in business, STEM, health care, and technology. The colleges share common course numbers for 350 of the most common courses offered by the colleges.

3. The colleges share common eLearning tools, including a learning management system, eTutoring and lecture capture systems, as well as dedicated reference librarians.
4. The college system has a well-established infrastructure for sharing courses across colleges. Washington OnLine (WAOL) is a 15-year consortium that allows multiple colleges to pool enrollments in online classes, share funding for online faculty, and facilitate online professional development for faculty and staff.
5. The college system recently completed the Open Course Library, with open source syllabi, instructional materials, and very low cost online textbooks or course packs for 81 of the most commonly enrolled courses in the college system.

Conceptual Framework

Washington's community and technical college system wants to test the concept of competency-based degrees.

System-wide "proof of concept" effort:

- All colleges will have the opportunity to participate in offering competency-based courses and degrees to their students through a consortium of member colleges.

Phased approach to implementation:

- **Phase 1** – Four colleges with Gates grant support pilot competency based IT certificates starting Fall 2013 or Winter 2014. Learnings will be used to implement competency based degrees in Phases 2 and 3.
- **Phase 2** – One college takes a leadership role in creating an "institute" to conduct a pilot, developing and testing competency based courses for an associate degree. The lead college serves as the administrative and fiscal agent for Phase 2. Phase 2 colleges participate in decisions on administrative processes. The lead college will consider all interested college faculty for participation in curriculum and assessment development.
- **Phase 3** – Competency based courses and degrees may be expanded and implemented statewide by additional interested colleges through pooled enrollments or by offering courses with their own faculty. Participating colleges will adopt the competency based degree and have needed student and business services in place.

Students:

- Eligible students must demonstrate readiness to succeed in college level, online courses.
 - ✓ College ready
 - ✓ Complete an orientation course prior to starting the program
 - ✓ Successfully completed a college level online class, or an assessment demonstrating competency in online learning (such as Smarter Measure)
- The degree program will be structured to allow multiple start dates within a term and student progress towards course competencies throughout all four quarters of the academic year, so that students can complete associate degrees in 18 months or less.
 - ✓ Students will enroll in 6 month terms with monthly start dates in the first three months of each term
 - ✓ ctcLink can accommodate programs with multiple terms offered by colleges
- Programs will be financial aid eligible consistent with Federal and State financial aid regulations.
 - ✓ All courses will be credit based
 - ✓ Learning analytics imbedded in Canvas, the colleges' learning management system, can be used to provide evidence of weekly participation required for federal financial aid
 - ✓ Students cannot blend programs with standard (quarter based) and non-standard (6 month) terms for financial aid eligibility
 - ✓ Financial aid recipients may be able to complete courses simultaneously rather than sequentially, will be determined for Phase 3

Curriculum:

- All the competency-based courses will be online, asynchronous, and available through pooled enrollments.
 - ✓ All colleges are using Canvas as their learning management system
 - ✓ Use WAOL infrastructure for pooled enrollments
- The most promising degree to start with is the business transfer associate degree, the highest enrolled transfer degree that can be offered by all 34 community and technical colleges.
 - ✓ 18 highest enrolled business transfer degree courses are identified, consistent with requirements of the statewide business Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) degree
 - ✓ These courses will not be redesigned for 6 month terms, but continue at their current credits offered under the quarter system. Course redesign will focus on

removing time as a factor in progressing through the content and assessments as well as identifying assessment rubrics for the course competencies

- ✓ Member colleges will adopt the entire competency based degree rather than course by course adoptions

- Students will advance through the competencies and courses at their own pace.
 - ✓ Students will negotiate the number of courses and credits enrolled with a navigator prior to the start of each term
 - ✓ Course assessment rubrics will include pretests to inform course loads for the student
 - ✓ Students who complete all courses prior to the end of the term will have access to materials for subsequent courses prior to enrolling in the next term.

- Courses will use open source materials, including online and campus learning resources.
 - ✓ Open course library materials can contribute to some courses
 - ✓ Curricula will adhere to Quality Matters Standards
 - ✓ Courses will adhere to all best practices in accessibility for students with disabilities

- Faculty will identify the course and program competencies, select learning resources, and design the assessment rubrics with the support of staff expertise in library resources, instructional design, and psychometrics. Faculty will teach the courses and faculty will evaluate student work against competencies using the assessment rubrics.

- Students will demonstrate at least 80% mastery of course competencies, and receive grades of A, B or incomplete.
 - ✓ Incomplete grades for students who don't achieve competencies and finish a course by the end of term will be consistent with existing college grading policies.

Finance:

- The cost to students will be consistent with quarterly tuition and fee rates charged to state-supported students.
 - ✓ Students will pay the equivalent of two quarters full time state supported tuition and fees at the beginning of each 6 month term
 - ✓ Costs for books and materials are in addition to tuition and fees

- Phase 2 colleges will assume the design costs of the initial degree program and courses as well as the operating costs for piloting the program
 - ✓ Explore grant or one-time funding for start up costs such as curriculum and assessment design

- ✓ Curricula, learning resources and assessment rubrics will be “open” and sharable by other colleges and their faculty
- ✓ Costs for initial design of 18 asynchronous online courses and assessments for a business transfer degree and first year start up costs are estimated at \$1.1 million. Budget includes faculty, student support and financial aid staff, IT infrastructure, and administration/marketing.
- Business model for consortium in Phase 3
 - ✓ System level staff for some functions will be considered to create cost efficiencies among consortium members
 - ✓ Colleges will subcontract with the lead college for shared instruction and services
 - ✓ Specific costs will be identified for Phase 3 colleges participating in pooled enrollments, pooled services or shared curricula based on actual costs in Phase 2.
- Member colleges will enroll and transcript students in the competency-based degree programs and be able to report enrollments for state support.
 - ✓ State supported students will pay the equivalent of standard tuition and fees for full-time students with revenues deposited consistent with regular state tuition and fees
 - ✓ Two cost models will be developed in Phase 2, one for state supported enrollments and one for self-supported enrollments.