

2016

A REPORT FROM THE COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS

ACCELERATED DEGREE  
PROGRAMS WORK GROUP  
REPORT

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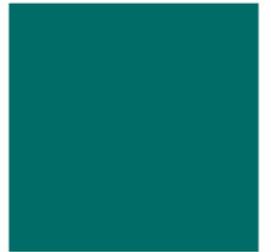
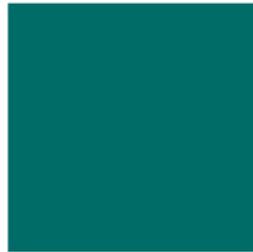
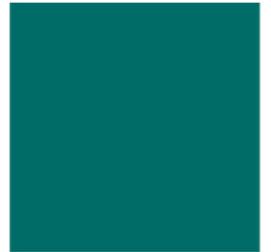
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Washingtonians have a rich and diverse menu of pathways to quality degree completion. Within the public baccalaureate sector, students can earn college credit as early as the 10th grade and access higher education as late in life as they desire. Washingtonians can pursue a single course in-person, online or a combination of both and earn a baccalaureate, masters, doctorate, applied doctorate, applied baccalaureate degree or certificate. In addition, students can attend other institutions, work, travel, and volunteer before and while attending the state's public four-year colleges and universities.

Within this context, accelerated degree pathways have recently received state and national attention in response to growing student, workforce and state demands to improve college affordability, address workforce needs and increase degree completion.

Defined as academic pathways that structurally reduce time to degree for baccalaureate degree attainment, the development and implementation of accelerated degree pathways have been explored by a handful of states and institutions. In 2016 the Washington Legislature convened a Work Group to explore state and institutional efforts around accelerated degree pathways, best practices and challenges to the implementation of these programs and develop recommendations that would effectively increase the overall rate of students achieving their baccalaureate degree within three years.

This report highlights the multiple frameworks that have emerged as accelerated degree pathways, student demographics, best practices and the benefits and challenges for students and institutions.

In Washington, according to Washington's Education and Research Data Center (ERDC), 8.6% of the graduating Class of 2014, who enrolled at a public four-year institution directly from high school, completed a baccalaureate degree in three years or less. Washington's baccalaureate institutions are committed to increasing awareness and pathways for students who want to accelerate their degree attainment, however, resources remain a critical component for developing and communicating degree pathways and removing barriers to student success.

Research and best practices suggest that in addition to resources, accelerated degree pathways should be considered one of many opportunities universities and colleges offer students to meet student and state degree completion goals. As Washington Senate Bill 5442 recognized, accelerated degree pathways are designed for academically qualified students and do not represent a new three-year standard for all students. Accelerated degree pathways should exist to provide an opportunity to expand options while not diminishing the quality or value of a standard baccalaureate degree.<sup>1</sup>

Based on the research, national and institutional best practices around accelerated learning and the recognition that resources are key to supporting affordable diverse and robust degree pathways for students, the Work Group recommends:

- ▶ Continual support of dual/concurrent enrollment program capacity and awareness efforts. Washington's existing dual/concurrent enrollment programs provide a visible and proven means of earning a college degree in a faster and more efficient manner. Washington is recognized nationally for its work in this area. To build on Washington's commitment, strength and success of these programs, the state should continue to support dual/concurrent enrollment program capacity and resources for awareness efforts.

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1. Senate Bill 5442. 2011. <http://lawfilesexternal.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2011-12/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5442-S.SL.pdf>

- ▶ Accelerated degree pathways in Washington should be institution-led initiatives. The multiple structures by which accelerated degree pathways may be developed should complement the mission, culture and student demographics of an institution. In addition, accelerated degree pathway programs require departmental cross-collaboration including, but not limited to, student services, facilities and marketing. Accelerated degree pathways in Washington should be institution-led to align with institutional missions, student demographics and regional and state needs.
- ▶ Institutions should promote awareness of accelerated pathways. Accelerated degree pathways are enhanced by partnerships between institutions and students. Critical to this partnership is clear communication about the availability of accelerated degree pathways, policies and expectations. Washington's public four-year colleges and universities should make awareness of accelerated degree pathways clear in institutional academic communications with students, such as publications.
- ▶ High school partners should participate in increasing awareness of accelerated pathways. Accelerated degree pathways require early awareness for success. To maximize participation in current accelerated degree pathways and to prepare students for success, Washington's public four-year institutions and high schools are encouraged to seek opportunities to partner in promoting awareness, communication and advising efforts that inform high school students about the availability and expectations of accelerated degree pathways whenever possible.

## INTRODUCTION

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Accelerated degree pathways have captured the attention of policymakers in recent years as an innovative approach to improve college affordability, address workforce needs and increase degree completion. Defined as pathways that structurally reduce time to degree from the traditional four years to less than four years, multiple models of accelerated degree pathways have emerged at the state and institutional levels.

In its 2016 Supplemental Operating Budget the Washington Legislature created a Work Group to study the benefits, best practices and challenges surrounding accelerated degree programs at the national and state levels.

The Work Group, convened in June 2016, included representation from each of the four-year public colleges and universities, a public baccalaureate director of financial aid, co-chair of the Academic Credit for Prior Learning Work Group, a public baccalaureate director of state government relations and a representative from the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. The Work Group was staffed by the Council of Presidents. The Work Group met on a monthly basis via conference call and published meeting notes and materials on the Council of Presidents website ([http://www.councilofpresidents.org/adp\\_wg.html](http://www.councilofpresidents.org/adp_wg.html)) (See Appendices A and B).

This final report provides a framework for accelerated degree pathways, a summary of efforts at the state and institutional levels, identified best practices for implementation and challenges to increasing participation in accelerated degree pathways.

## ACCELERATED DEGREE PATHWAYS: HISTORY AND INTRODUCTION OF A FOUR-MODEL FRAMEWORK

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Accelerated degree pathways, though deemed innovative, have been part of higher education for decades. The earliest report of accelerated degree pathways was in the late 19th century and early 20th century when Harvard University implemented efforts to reduce time to degree. Nearly fifty years later, many World War II veterans attended summer school and took extra credits, with the assistance of the federal G.I. Bill, to complete earlier.<sup>2</sup> In the 1990s, increases in enrollment, declines in state support and expansion of Advanced Placement courses led to more institutions exploring accelerated degree pathways.<sup>3</sup> During this same time, the Washington Legislature passed the Learning By Choice Law, which established the Running Start Program<sup>4</sup> In 2014-15 over 23,000 students in 11th and 12th grade were enrolled in Running Start<sup>5</sup>.

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2. G. Keller. Why Colleges Should Offer 3-year Diplomas. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. November 14, 2008. <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-Colleges-Should-Offer/3253/>

3. W.H. Honan. Completing College in Only 3 Years? Idea is Gaining Support Nationwide. *The New York Times*. September 29, 1993. <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/09/29/education/completing-college-in-only-3-years-idea-is-gaining-support-nationwide.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

4. OSPI Running Start. <http://www.k12.wa.us/SecondaryEducation/CareerCollegeReadiness/RunningStart.aspx>

5. OSPI High School Dual Credit Participation Summary 2014-15. <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/DualCredit.aspx?domain=DualCredit&groupLevel=District&schoolId=1&reportLevel=State&year=2014-15&yrs=2014-15>

In recent years, accelerated degree pathways have come into favor again. Amid concerns about student loan debt, skills shortages in the workforce and degree completion, states and institutions are exploring opportunities to provide pathways to qualified students who want to accelerate their degree completion.

In 2012 the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)<sup>6</sup> identified four models utilized by states and institutions to structure accelerated degree pathways.

- ▶ **Prior Learning Credit Model**-Includes dual credit and prior learning as part of the baccalaureate pathway.
- ▶ **Competency-Based Model**-Assesses student knowledge and skills versus the use of a seat time model.
- ▶ **Compression Model**-Condenses a baccalaureate degree program into three years with the integration of summer and inter-term courses.
- ▶ **Course Reduction Model**-Reduces the number of credits required for a baccalaureate degree.

The framework advanced by AASCU recognizes the multiple structures by which accelerated degree pathways are developed and implemented across the country.

## STATE AND INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH ACCELERATED DEGREE PATHWAYS: A SUMMARY

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Accelerated degree pathways, in practice, are implemented through multiple structures. While the most widely known approach is the compression model, which condenses a four-year baccalaureate degree from four years to three years through the integration of summer and inter-term courses, the most widely implemented model is the prior learning credit model. The compression model and competency-based models are less common and few institutions have explored the course reduction model. In some cases, states and institutions have used a combination of models to develop accelerated degree pathways (See Appendix C).

Washington's public four-year institutions mirror national trends. The primary accelerated degree pathway for the public four-year sector is prior learning credit. All six public baccalaureate colleges and universities accept credit for prior learning.

Washington's public baccalaureate sector also offers a competency-based program and a compression model program. Central Washington University is the only public four-year institution that currently offers a competency-based program through their Information Technology and Administrative Management (ITAM) department. In Fall 2016, Eastern Washington University launched the sector's only compression based program, Finish in 3. None of Washington's public four-year institutions offer a course reduction model program.

### Prior Learning Credit Model

Nationwide, opportunities exist at both the state and institutional level for students to earn college credit prior to attending a postsecondary institution. For students enrolling directly from high school, dual/concurrent enrollment programs exist across the nation. Dual/concurrent enrollment programs provide the opportunity for students to earn college credit while in high school.<sup>7</sup> For students who have a gap

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6. The Three-Year Bachelor's Degree: Reform Measure or Red Herring? *American Association of State Colleges and Universities*. September 2012. <http://www.aascu.org/policy/publications/policy-matters/2012/threeyeardegrees.pdf>

7. 50-State Comparison: Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Policies. *The Education Commission of the States*. March 25, 2016. <http://www.ecs.org/dual-concurrent-enrollment-policies/>

between high school graduation and enrollment in postsecondary education there are opportunities to earn academic credit through prior learning programs such as portfolio assessments, evaluation of military and industry training, and challenge exams and courses.<sup>8</sup>

States and institutions have taken advantage of the growing opportunities for students to earn college credit prior to enrolling in a postsecondary institution to provide accelerated degree pathways for students. In 2011, Ohio passed legislation that requires all public universities to post plans describing how students can achieve a bachelor's degree in three years.<sup>9</sup> The majority of campuses identified thirty or more credit hours that students can bring in through dual credit, dual enrollment or career technical high school articulation agreements. Rhode Island's legislature required the Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education to develop a pilot program that would allow high school students to earn college credits while still enrolled in high school to be able to graduate from college in three years.<sup>10</sup>

In Washington, the public four-year institutions accept credit from multiple sources, including pathways to earn dual/concurrent enrollment credit for high school and college by both completing college courses and standardized exams while in high school. According to the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, in 2014-15 there were 114,924 students, grades 9-12, in Advanced Placement, Cambridge, College in the High School, International Baccalaureate and Running Start courses.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, leadership of Washington's institutions served as the foundation for recent legislative efforts, including the most recent dual credit bill – HB 1546, The Launch Year Act – and HB 1795 (2011). Within the public baccalaureate sector, institutions have mapped out equivalencies to college courses and credit awarded for Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams and developed sector-wide language recognizing credit for these programs. Nationally, according to a recent study<sup>12</sup>, dual credit decreases time to completion of both associate's and bachelor's degrees. According to the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, there are a growing number of students who are graduating from high school and earning an associate's degree through dual credit pathways.

Washington's four-year public colleges and universities also participate in academic credit for prior learning. In 2014-15, Washington's public and private, non-profit four-year institutions and community and technical colleges together awarded academic credit to 17,759 students for prior learning that counted toward their major or completion of a degree or certificate and approximately 363,126 academic quarter credits were accepted by colleges and universities toward degrees or certificates.<sup>13</sup>

### Compression Model

The compression model frames the implementation of the majority of programs deemed as “three-year degrees”. Programs designed under this model enable students to complete the same requirements as

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8. A. Sherman & R. Klein-Collins. State Policy Approaches to Support Prior Learning Assessment. Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. 2015. [http://www.cael.org/hubfs/premium\\_content\\_resources/Home\\_page\\_books/CAEL\\_HCM-PLA-State-Policy-Report-2016.pdf](http://www.cael.org/hubfs/premium_content_resources/Home_page_books/CAEL_HCM-PLA-State-Policy-Report-2016.pdf)

9. Ohio Department of Higher Education. 3 Year Degree Plan. <https://www.ohiohighered.org/3-year-degreesy-year-degrees>

10. Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education. *Bachelor's Degree in Three: Three-Year Pilot Program Proposal*.

11. Washington Office of the Superintendent of Instruction. <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/DualCredit.aspx?domain=DualCredit&groupLevel=District&schoolId=1&reportLevel=State&year=2013-14>

12. Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A, & Hwang, Y. (2016, September). Time to Degree: A National View of the Time Enrolled and Elapsed for Associate and Bachelor's Degree Earners (*Signature Report No. 11*). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

13. J. West. Prior Learning Assessment Workgroup: 2015 Progress Report. December 2015.

students in a “traditional” baccalaureate degree program but in three years. Accelerated degree programs that use the compression model framework, in general, require the same number of credits and the same courses be completed.<sup>14</sup> Students are able to meet these requirements and complete in three years most often by enrolling in summer term and inter-term courses.

In 2010, for example, the University of California Commission on the Future suggested a formal process to streamline an undergraduate degree to three years for students who were willing to accept a pre-defined set of conditions. The Commission is charged with developing a new vision for the university within the context of the university’s mission and budget while reaffirming its commitment to quality, access and affordability.<sup>15</sup> The Commission proposed several components including required attendance of summer session courses; full use of Advanced Placement and other honors credits; incentives to entice students to participate, such as priority enrollment and a guarantee of a fixed-tuition level for three years; and development of streamlined major programs, advising and registration procedures that would help students graduate in three years.<sup>16</sup>

In 2011, Washington passed SB 5442 to formalize efforts of the state’s public baccalaureate institutions to provide accelerated degree pathways for students. The bill stated that public four-year colleges and universities may develop accelerated baccalaureate degree programs that allow academically qualified students to obtain a baccalaureate degree in three years without attending summer classes or enrolling in more than a full-time class load during the regular academic year. It also allows academically qualified students to begin course work within their academic field during their first term or semester of enrollment.

The law recognized that accelerated degree pathways are designed for academically qualified students and do not represent a new three-year standard for all students, stating that “accelerated degree pathways should exist to provide an opportunity to expand options while not diminishing the quality or value of a standard baccalaureate degree”.<sup>17</sup> Since the passage of SB 5442 only one four-year public university or college has implemented a compression model accelerated degree pathway. In Fall 2016, Eastern Washington University launched “Finish in 3”. Finish in 3 allows students to graduate early by earning credits year-round.<sup>18</sup>

### Competency-Based Model

The competency-based model assesses student knowledge and skills versus the use of seat time. The U.S. Department of Education defines competency-based learning as “transitioning away from seat time, in favor of a structure that creates flexibility, allows students to progress as they demonstrate mastery of academic content, regardless of time, place, or pace of learning.”<sup>19</sup> More broadly stated, competency-based learning allows academic credit to be earned on the basis of student learning rather than credit or clock hours.

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14. Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees. *Board Committee Goals: Three-Year Baccalaureate and 12-Month Calendar*. May 17, 2011.

15. University of California Commission on the Future. <http://ucfuture.universityofcalifornia.edu/charge.html>

16. University of California Commission on the Future. *Working Group First Round Recommendations: Education and Curriculum*. [http://ucfuture.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/pdf/cotf\\_first\\_recs\\_ed.pdf](http://ucfuture.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/pdf/cotf_first_recs_ed.pdf)

17. Senate Bill 5442. 2011. <http://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2011-12/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5442-S.SL.pdf>

18. Eastern Washington University. Finish in 3. <https://sites.ewu.edu/3yeardegree/>

19. U.S. Department of Education. Definition of Competency-Based Learning. <http://www.ed.gov/oii-news/competency-based-learning-or-personalized-learning>

While higher education has a history of recognizing learning outside of the classroom for academic credit, competency-based programs in which students progress toward a degree as they demonstrate mastery of new academic content is relatively new. According to the Center on Higher Education Reform,<sup>20</sup> approximately 17 institutions in 2015 had one degree program that was entirely competency-based learning; had several degrees that were entirely competency-based learning or gave students the option to complete nearly all remaining coursework via competency-based learning; or offered all degrees via competency-based learning.

In Washington, Washington Governors University (WGU-Washington) is a leader in the competency-based model. WGU-Washington is an online, competency-based university endorsed by the 2011 Legislature in partnership with the nationally recognized Western Governors University. In addition to WGU-Washington, Central Washington University offers a competency-based program.

Central Washington University'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 online program offers two specializations - one in Administrative Management and the other in Retail Management and Technology.<sup>21</sup>

### **Course Reduction Model**

The course reduction model structures a baccalaureate degree program to be completed with less than the traditional 180-quarter credits/120-semester credits baccalaureate degree requirement. There are no course reduction model programs readily known in the United States.

The lack of course reduction model programs is in large part due to the need to actually reduce the number of credits earned to complete a baccalaureate degree. Though the history of the baccalaureate degree credit 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.<sup>22</sup>

Since then, various accreditation bodies have addressed credit and degree policies for their regions. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), 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."<sup>23</sup> 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.

### **Other Accelerated Degree Pathways: Transfer Pathways and Accelerated Graduate & Professional Programs**

Beyond the four-model framework, states and institutions have a history of working to accelerate degree attainment through transfer pathways and 3-2 graduate and professional programs. Nationwide,

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20. R. Kelchen. *The Landscape of Competency-Based Education: Enrollments, Demographics and Affordability*. January 2015. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/competency-based-education-landscape.pdf>

21. Central Washington University, Information Technology and Administrative Management Program. <http://www.cwu.edu/it-management/>

22. L. Anderson, personal communication, July 8, 2016.

23. V. Martinez, personal communication, July 11, 2016.

opportunities exist at both the state and institutional level for students to both streamline and accelerate their degree programs through transfer pathways.<sup>24</sup>

Washington is widely recognized as a national leader for transfer pathways. According to the Community College Research Center<sup>25</sup>, Washington ranks first in the nation for the average rate by which a community college student transfers to a four-year institution earns a bachelor's degree within six years of entering higher education and ranks fifth in the nation for the average rate by which a community college transfer student earns a credential before transferring to a four-year institution.

For more than 40 years, the public four-year institutions in collaboration with the community and technical colleges and the private non-profit four-year institutions have participated in several transfer pathways to improve the efficiency of degree attainment in Washington. Washington's public four-year institutions are partners in the state's Associate in Arts -Direct Transfer Degree (DTA) and Associate of Science-Transfer Degree (AS-T). The public four-year institutions participate in the state's nine Major Related Programs (MRPs) ranging in areas from computer science to math education to biology. In addition, the public four-year institutions have individually developed articulation agreements with institutions both in and out of state.

At the graduate and professional level, colleges and universities have designed programs to reduce the time to degree. The most common pathway is a 3/2 split, which structures a program for a three-year undergraduate degree and a two-year graduate degree program; at the end of which a student earns a bachelors and a masters degree. 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.

## **ACCELERATED DEGREE PATHWAYS: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

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There is minimal student demographic data and information at the federal and state levels about students pursuing and completing a degree in less than four years.

The limited national research that does exist on students who pursue and complete an accelerated degree pathway suggests that students, in general, tend to be driven by a variety of factors. They may be influenced by financial concerns, career aspirations, future education plans (e.g., graduate studies), access to dual enrollment programs or more personal factors (e.g., peer, family and cultural influences). Students seeking accelerated degree pathways are often recognized as being highly motivated, high ability, independent, self-directed and often identified as possessing good time management skills, a clear understanding of educational goals, and a strong academic foundation.<sup>26</sup>

Within the AACSU four-model framework, student demographics vary depending on the accelerated degree program model. For example:

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24. 50-State Comparison: Transfer and Articulation Policies. *The Education Commission of the States*. April 18 2016. <http://www.ecs.org/transfer-and-articulation-policies-db/>

25. *Community College Research Center*. Tracking Transfer: New Measures of Institutional and State Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students Attain Bachelor's Degrees. January 2016

26. M. Firmin and K. Merrick Gilson. Driven and No Regrets: A Qualitative Analysis of Students Earning Baccalaureate Degrees in Three Years. *Educational Research Quarterly*. 2007.

### ► **Prior Learning Credit Model**

In Washington, in 2014-15, of the students who enrolled in Advanced Placement, Cambridge International Exams, College in the High School, International Baccalaureate, and Running Start courses, 63% were White and 55% were female. In addition, 29% qualified for free and reduced meals and 11% qualified as gifted.<sup>27</sup>

Nationally, over half of students who pursue an accelerated degree pathway by integrating prior learning are female. Two-thirds are White followed by Black, non-Hispanic. Seventy percent did not receive financial aid.<sup>28</sup> In this context, prior learning includes opportunities to earn academic credit through portfolio assessment, evaluation of military and industry training and challenge exams and courses.

### ► **Competency-Based Model**

According to the Center on Higher Education Reform<sup>29</sup>, the majority of students enrolled in stand alone competency-based institutions are White (64%) followed by students who identify as Black (21%). Over half are female and 37% receive federal student loans while 26% receive Pell Grants.

In Washington, according to Washington's Education and Research Data Center (ERDC), 8.6% of the graduating Class of 2014, who enrolled at a public four-year institution directly from high school, completed a baccalaureate degree in three years or less. Data shows that on average 8.7% of students who enrolled at a public four-year institution between 2007 and 2014, directly from high school, completed a baccalaureate degree in three years or less.

This same data set showed that, of those in the Class of 2014 who graduated in three years or less, 32.8% received a Pell or State Need Grant; as compared to 33.2% for those who graduated in more than three years. The number of students who enrolled at a public four-year institution directly from high school and completed a baccalaureate degree in three years or less and received a Pell or State Need Grant increased by 56% between 2007-08 and 2013-14.

In addition, of those who graduated in three years or less 65.1% were White, 12.7% were Asian/Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 6.5% were Other, 5.8% were Multi-racial, 5.6% were Hispanic, 3% were Unknown, 0.8% were Black and 0.4% were American Indian or Alaska Native. Finally, of those who graduated in three years or less 30.8% earned a STEM/High Demand degree; compared to 37.7% who graduated in more than three years. The number of students who enrolled at a public four-year institution directly from high school and completed a baccalaureate degree in three years or less in a STEM/High Demand field increased by 49% between 2007-08 and 2013-14.

The ERDC also found that the top five areas of study for those who graduated in the Class of 2014 in three years or less were: Social Sciences (12.5%); Business, Management, Marketing and Related Support Services (12.4%); Biological and Biomedical Sciences (10.8%); Psychology (8.5%) and Communication, Journalism and Related Programs (7.5%).

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27. Washington Office of the Superintendent of Instruction. <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/DualCredit.aspx>

28. *The Council for Adult & Experiential Learning*. Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success: A 48-Institution Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Adult Student Outcomes. [http://getcollegecredit.com/assets/pdf/PLA\\_Fueling-the-Race.pdf](http://getcollegecredit.com/assets/pdf/PLA_Fueling-the-Race.pdf)

29. R. Kelchen. *The Landscape of Competency-Based Education: Enrollments, Demographics and Affordability*. January 2015. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/competency-based-education-landscape.pdf>

## BEST PRACTICES TO PROMOTE ACCELERATED DEGREE PATHWAYS

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Best practices differ depending on the accelerated degree pathway model. The prior learning credit model, and to some extent the competency-based model, have more established best practices in part due to their longer history within postsecondary academic programs and policies. Very little exists with regard to best practices for compression and course reduction program models. 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.”<sup>30</sup>

Overall, the research and literature on accelerated degree pathways, though limited, suggests four major best practices:

- ▶ Accelerated degree pathways must be either institutional- or sector-led.
- ▶ Accelerated degree pathways should be considered one of many pathways students may pursue to earn a degree.
- ▶ Communication with students should be clear, both about the presence and requirements of accelerated degree pathways.
- ▶ Cohort models should be considered in the design and implementation of accelerated degree pathways.

## BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES FOR INSTITUTIONS AND STUDENTS

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Accelerated degree pathways provide potential benefits for students and institutions. Students may benefit from lower opportunity costs, reduced tuition costs, greater alignment between high school and college academics, and an expedited pathway to graduate or professional school. Institutions also have the potential to realize advantages such as increased utilization of campus facilities and positive enrollment impacts. The degree to which both a student and an institution may see benefits from accelerated degree pathways will range depending on the accelerated degree pathway model, student demographics, and institutional missions.

There are several challenges institutions and students may encounter in the development, implementation and pursuit of accelerated degree pathways. An examination of the potential challenges for accelerated degree pathways led to the identification of five major challenge areas for students and institutions – resources, financial aid, academic, institutional and other (See Appendix D). Within these areas there were some challenges that emerged across the four accelerated degree models and some that were specific to a particular model. Across a majority of the accelerated degree pathway models the need for sufficient resources to provide informed, efficient and sufficient advising for students in K-12 and postsecondary education presented a challenge. Beyond the simple but critical need for additional financial and personnel resources, this challenge proves difficult in aligning missions, structures, and goals between K-12 and postsecondary education.

In addition, financial aid eligibility was an important consideration - especially with regard to issues such as program length, quality and frequency of instruction, length of the term, and standard term schedules.

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30. M. Tsuleff. *A Three-Year Degree as a Trend in Higher Education*. *Association for Christians in Student Development*. August 31, 2011. <http://www.acsd.org/article/a-three-year-degree-as-a-trend-in-higher-education/>

The lack of resources at a minimum to fully support federal and state financial aid programs and additional resources that would be required to expand funding to support year-round federal and state aid programs are major challenges to traditional academic programs as well as accelerated degree programs.

Finally, consideration of the impact on resources when postsecondary education explores innovative program delivery models, such as accelerated degree models, is critical. The increased amount of time and work to process financial aid, student services and other services for any program that is outside of “normal” functions is substantial because the process moves from automated and broad to manual-work and case-by-case considerations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY CONSIDERATION OF ACCELERATED DEGREE PATHWAYS

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Washington’s public four-year colleges and universities provide a rich and diverse menu of pathways to quality degree completion. The diversity of mission, academic programming and students served is one of the greatest strengths of this sector.

Accelerated degree pathways should be considered as another one of the robust opportunities Washington’s public four-year institutions offer students to meet student and state degree completion goals. As Senate Bill 5442 recognized, accelerated degree pathways are designed for academically qualified students and do not represent a new three-year standard for all students. Accelerated degree pathways should exist to provide an opportunity to expand options while not diminishing the quality or value of a standard baccalaureate degree.<sup>31</sup>

The Work Group was charged with developing recommendations that would effectively increase the overall rate of students achieving their baccalaureate degree within three years.

Washington’s public four-year colleges and universities are actively working to address time to degree. Though Washington’s baccalaureate institutions are committed to increasing awareness and pathways for students who want to accelerate their degree attainment, resources are a critical component for developing and communicating degree pathways and removing barriers to student success.

- ▶ **Continue to support dual/concurrent enrollment program capacity and awareness efforts.** Washington’s existing dual/concurrent enrollment programs provide a visible and proven means of earning a college degree in a faster and more efficient manner. Washington is recognized nationally for its work in this area. To build on Washington’s commitment, strength and success of these programs, the state should continue to support dual/concurrent enrollment program capacity and resources for awareness efforts.
- ▶ **Accelerated degree pathways in Washington should be institution-led initiatives.** The multiple structures by which accelerated degree pathways may be developed should complement the mission, culture and student demographics of an institution. In addition, accelerated degree pathway programs require departmental cross-collaboration including, but not limited to, student services, facilities and marketing. Accelerated degree pathways in Washington should be institution-led to align with institutional missions, student demographics and regional and state needs.

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31. Senate Bill 5442. 2011. <http://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2011-12/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5442-S.SL.pdf>

- ▶ **Institutions should promote awareness of accelerated pathways.** Accelerated degree pathways are enhanced by partnerships between institutions and students. Critical to this partnership is clear communication about the availability of accelerated degree pathways, policies and expectations. Washington's public four-year colleges and universities should make awareness of accelerated degree pathways clear in institutional academic communications with students, such as publications.
- ▶ **High school partners should participate in increasing awareness of accelerated pathways.** Accelerated degree pathways require early awareness for success. To maximize participation in current accelerated degree pathways and to prepare students for success, Washington's public four-year institutions and high schools are encouraged to seek opportunities to partner in promoting awareness, communication and advising efforts that inform high school students about the availability and expectations of accelerated degree pathways whenever possible.

Over the course of this work the Work Group held several discussions that, while deemed beyond the scope of this effort, raised issues for further consideration with regard to accelerated degree pathways implementation and policies. Among the major issues the Work Group raised was the potential for additional work focused on reducing financial barriers for students who want to attend college year-round and exploring ways to minimize structural barriers.

## **APPENDIX A: ACCELERATED DEGREE PROGRAM WORK GROUP LEGISLATION AND CHARGE**

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### **Accelerated Degree Program Work Group**

#### **Charge**

Created as a budget proviso in the 2016 supplemental budget (Sec. 601(7)) , the public baccalaureate institutions shall create a work group to study the benefits, challenges, and best practices surrounding accelerated degree programs.

#### **Membership**

The work group shall include one representative from each institution, selected by the institution. The work group may invite, at its discretion, representatives from other public and private Washington institutions of higher education and agencies to provide advice and expertise.

#### **Deliverables**

The work group shall report to the appropriate committees of the legislature and the institutions of higher education on its findings and recommendations by December 31, 2016.

- ▶ Develop a set of institutional best practices to promote students' ability to successfully graduate with a baccalaureate degree within three years of entering a regional university or The Evergreen State College.
- ▶ Identify challenges or obstacles that prevent wider adoption of accelerated degree program options and university students from participating in three-year or other accelerated programs.
- ▶ Evaluate how public and private institutions of higher education in other states have engaged in accelerated baccalaureate degree programs.
- ▶ Develop recommendations that would effectively increase the overall rate of students achieving their baccalaureate degree within three years.

## APPENDIX B: ACCELERATED DEGREE PROGRAM WORK GROUP MEMBERS

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<b>Steve VanderStaay - Chair</b> Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, Western Washington University	<b>Mary Wack</b> Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, Washington State University
<b>Bernadette Jungblut</b> Associate Provost for Accreditation, Academic Planning, and Assessment, Central Washington University	<b>John Neace</b> Co-Chair of the Academic Credit for Prior Learning Work Group and Senior Director Interdisciplinary Studies and Off-Campus Programs, Eastern Washington University
<b>Janet Hubbard</b> Online Development Manager, Eastern Washington University	<b>Tracy Hall</b> Director of Financial Aid, The Evergreen State College
<b>Scott Coleman</b> Academic Dean, Curriculum, The Evergreen State College	<b>Chris Mulick</b> Director of State Relations, Washington State University
<b>Emily Leggio</b> Senior Associate Director for Enrollment Policy, Planning & Research, University of Washington	<b>Joe Holliday</b> Director of Student Services, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

**APPENDIX C: ACCELERATED DEGREE PATHWAYS: INSTITUTIONS**

<b>Accelerated Degree Pathways: Institutions</b>				
	<b>Prior Learning Credit</b>	<b>Competency-Based</b>	<b>Course Reduction</b>	<b>Compression</b>
<b>American University</b>				Global Scholars, Public Health Scholars, and Politics, Policy and Law Scholars
<b>Ashland University</b>				BS in Criminal Justice or Psychology  BA in Public Relations, Sport Communication, Strategic Communication, Psychology, Spanish, French, Music (Academic Studies Emphasis), Philosophy, Art, Business Administration and Economics
<b>Baldwin-Wallace College</b>				Dual-degree 3/2 programs in Business Administration or Social Work  Engineering- 3 year Pre-Engineering program and an additional 2 years at an engineering school. Students earns a BA from College and a BS degree from the engineering school.
<b>Ball State University</b>				Accounting, Anthropology, Business Administration, Communication Studies, Criminal Justice and Criminology, Economics- Business Financial Analyst, Finance, History –option only without an internship, Human Resource Management, Information Systems –Business, International Business, Marketing, Nursing, Operations Management – Business, Philosophy, Pre-Dentistry, Pre-Medicine, Psychology, Religious Studies, Risk Management and Insurance, Social Work, Sociology, and Women’s Studies

	Prior Learning Credit	Competency-Based	Course Reduction	Compression
<b>Bluffton University</b>				Art, Business Administration, Child Development, Economics, English, History, Information Technology, Marketing, Music, Spanish, Writing and Youth Ministry
<b>Bowling Green State University</b>	Ninety majors. Also can accelerate through compression			
<b>Central State University</b>				BA in Political Science  BS in Accounting, Business Administration, Geology and Geography
<b>Chatham University</b>				Integrated Degree Program. Dual-degree 3/2 programs.
<b>Cleveland State University</b>	Most Majors. Also can accelerate through compression			
<b>Eastern Washington University</b>				BA in English, Creative Writing Option; Criminal Justice; Communication Studies; Psychology; Economics; Management, General Business Option; and Visual Communication Design  BS in Exercise Science
<b>Grace College</b>				Redesigned curriculum of the entire college to accommodate a 3 year bachelor's degree or a 3/1 bachelor's degree and master's degree

	Prior Learning Credit	Competency-Based	Course Reduction	Compression
<b>Hartwick College</b>				Accounting, Art History, Biology, Business Administration, Chemistry, Computer Science, Economics, English, French, Geology, German, History, Information Science, Mathematics, Nursing, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Religious Studies, Sociology, Spanish and Theatre Arts.
<b>Kent State University</b>	Most Majors. Also can accelerate through compression			
<b>Lake Forest College</b>				3/2 programs. BA in Philosophy and Communication (requires 2-4 AP/college credits prior to matriculation)
<b>Lesley University</b>				The curriculum allows for students to pursue all bachelor degree offerings in a three-year format. The offerings include Business Management, Early Childhood Studies, Education, Human Services, Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Humanities, Liberal Studies, and Psychology and Applied Therapies
<b>Lipscomb University</b>				BA in American Studies, BA or BS in Law, Justice and Society
<b>Miami University</b>	Most Majors. Also can accelerate through compression			
<b>Mount St. Mary's University</b>				All Majors

	Prior Learning Credit	Competency-Based	Course Reduction	Compression
<b>Nichols College</b>				BA in Business Administration
<b>Northern Arizona University</b>		Online, competency-based in Business Administration, Computer Information Technology and Liberal Studies		
<b>Ohio University</b>	Most Majors. Also can accelerate through compression			
<b>Shawnee State University</b>	Also can complete through compression. BA in History, International Relations, Psychology, Sociology, and Social Science BFA in Studio Arts BS in Chemistry, Biology, Computer Engineering Technology, Natural Science and Sport Studies			
<b>Southern Oregon University</b>	The Acc Bacc program actually reduces the number of credits required for graduation by taking into account your high school work.  Participating Majors: Business Administration, Communication, Computer Science, Creative Writing, Criminology & Criminal Justice, Economics, Elementary Education, Emerging Media and Digital Arts, English, Foreign Languages & Literature: Spanish, Health, Physical Education and Leadership, History, International Studies, Mathematics, Outdoor Adventure Leadership, Political Science, Psychology, and Anthropology & Sociology			

	Prior Learning Credit	Competency-Based	Course Reduction	Compression
<b>Southern Oregon University</b>	<p>The Acc Bacc program actually reduces the number of credits required for graduation by taking into account your high school work.</p> <p>Participating Majors: Business Administration, Communication, Computer Science, Creative Writing, Criminology &amp; Criminal Justice, Economics, Elementary Education, Emerging Media and Digital Arts, English, Foreign Languages &amp; Literature: Spanish, Health, Physical Education and Leadership, History, International Studies, Mathematics, Outdoor Adventure Leadership, Political Science, Psychology, and Anthropology &amp; Sociology</p>			
<b>St. John's University</b>				<p>BS in Criminal Justice; Finance; Legal Studies; Management; Marketing; Mass Communications; and Sport Management.</p> <p>BA in English; Government and Politics; Liberal Studies; Psychology and Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology</p>
<b>The Ohio State University</b>	Most Majors. Also can accelerate through compression			
<b>The University of Toledo</b>	Most Majors. Also can accelerate through compression			
<b>Thomas More College</b>				Suggested for majors with fewer credit hours and pre-req. Education and Nursing are not available in this format.
<b>University of Akron</b>	All Majors			

	Prior Learning Credit	Competency-Based	Course Reduction	Compression
<b>University of Cincinnati</b>				Participating Institutional Colleges: College of Business, College of Allied Health Sciences, College Conservatory of Music, College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning, College of Education, Criminal Justice, & Human Services, and College of Arts & Sciences
<b>University of Houston-Victoria</b>				Communication, Criminal Justice, English, History, and Psychology.
<b>University of North Carolina -Greensboro</b>	Combines with compressed model. Majors: Accounting; African American and African Diaspora Studies; Anthropology; Archaeology; Art History; Arts Administration; Biochemistry; Business Administration; Chemistry; Classical Studies (Archaeology, Civilization or Language & Literature); Communication Studies; Economics; English; Entrepreneurship; Finance; Geography; History; Information Systems and Supply Chain Management; Kinesiology; Languages, Literatures and Cultures (French Studies, German Studies, Global Languages and Communities, Spanish); Marketing; Mathematics and Statistics; Media Studies; Music (BA only); Peace and Conflict Studies; Philosophy; Political Science; Psychology; Public Health; Religious Studies; Russian; Social Work; Sociology; and Studio Art (BA only)			

	Prior Learning Credit	Competency-Based	Course Reduction	Compression
<b>Ursuline College</b>	College Adult Program is an adult bachelor degree completion program for working men and women looking to complete their program in an accelerated format. Students need at least 30 transferrable semester credits and 3 years of work experience.			
<b>Wentworth Institute of Technology</b>	Building Construction Management can transfer up to 80 credits into program from prior educational and professional experiences			Project Management
<b>WGU-Washington</b>		Online, competency-based. Degrees in the College of Health Professions, Information Technology, Business and Teachers Education		
<b>Youngstown State University</b>	Participating Institutional Colleges: College of Health and Human Services, College of Creative Arts and Communication, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, College of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics and the College of Business Administration			

**APPENDIX D: ACCELERATED DEGREE PATHWAYS: CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES**

**Accelerated Degree Pathways: Challenges and Obstacles**

	Prior Learning Credit	Competency-Based	Course Reduction	Compression
<b>FUNDING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sufficient resources to provide knowledgeable, efficient, and sufficient advising and other student support services both in K-12 and postsecondary education</li> <li>- State funding for dual credit programs</li> <li>- Student fees for dual credit programs</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sufficient resources to provide knowledgeable, efficient, and sufficient advising and other student support services both in K-12 and postsecondary education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sufficient resources to provide knowledgeable, efficient, and sufficient advising and other student support services both in K-12 and postsecondary education</li> </ul>
<b>FINANCIAL AID</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Too many credits for financial aid purposes. In Washington the general maximum is 150% of a student's program, which includes all credits a student earns</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial aid eligibility issues that may come into play program length, quality and frequency of instruction, length of the quarter and standard term schedules</li> <li>- Lack of year-round Pell or year-round State Need Grant</li> <li>- High credit loads may exceed federal student loan limits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial aid eligibility issues that may come into play program length, quality and frequency of instruction, length of the quarter and standard term schedules</li> <li>- Lack of year-round Pell or year-round State Need Grant</li> <li>- High credit loads may exceed federal student loan limits</li> </ul>

	Prior Learning Credit	Competency-Based	Course Reduction	Compression
<b>ACADEMIC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acceptance for some professional graduate programs</li> <li>- Pedagogy has evolved from a 2+2 to incorporating the major throughout the four-years of the degree especially in the STEM fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Undetermined program length, students must demonstrate mastery</li> <li>- Relatively new learning pedagogy</li> <li>- Alignment with accreditation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Standardization of the 180-quarter or 120-semester credit requirement for a baccalaureate degree, potential accreditation issues and state laws or rule issues</li> <li>- Coordination with other sectors, such as community and technical colleges</li> <li>-Lack of academic flexibility, such as switching majors or double majoring</li> <li>- Limited program offerings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Standardization of the 180-quarter or 120-semester credit requirement for a baccalaureate degree, potential accreditation issues and state laws or rule issues</li> <li>- Coordination with other sectors, such as community and technical colleges</li> <li>-Lack of academic flexibility, such as switching majors or double majoring</li> <li>- Limited program offerings</li> </ul>
<b>INSTITUTIONAL</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May involve new institutional obligations that carry higher costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May involve new institutional obligations that carry higher costs, such as advising</li> <li>- Potential stress on campus operations if changes are needed with regard to facilities, faculty contract and campus operations to meet the scheduling of program</li> <li>- Pathways for students who begin at the developmental education level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May involve new institutional obligations that carry higher costs, such as advising</li> <li>- Potential stress on campus operations if changes are needed with regard to facilities, faculty contract and campus operations to meet the scheduling of program.</li> <li>- Pathways for students who begin at the developmental education level</li> </ul>

	Prior Learning Credit	Competency-Based	Course Reduction	Compression
<b>OTHER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advising and communication in K-12</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staff and faculty contracts and governance</li> <li>- Federal and state regulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May limit college experience including opportunities to study abroad or intern</li> <li>- Work and family obligations</li> <li>- Cohort model, which is often used, creates fewer entry points for students</li> <li>- Effects on student learning including heavier course loads, limited opportunities, and stress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May limit college experience including opportunities to study abroad or intern</li> <li>- Work and family obligations</li> <li>- Cohort model, which is often used, creates fewer entry points for students</li> <li>- Effects on student learning including heavier course loads, limited opportunities, and stress</li> </ul>