

Oregon's Noncredit to Credit Student Progression to Completion

Helping to meet Oregon's 40-40-20 Goal



Oregon Community College Noncredit Task Force

June 2012

Report and recommendations to Commissioner Camille Preus regarding the importance, exploration and future of noncredit to credit student progression as Oregon Community Colleges strive to meet the vision of 40 percent of Oregonians with an associate's degree or postsecondary credential by the year 2025.

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The importance of Noncredit to Credit Student Progression

The State of Oregon has a goal that by the year 2025, 40 percent of Oregonians have a bachelor's degree or higher, another 40 percent have obtained an associate's degree or postsecondary credential and the remaining 20 percent of Oregon's adults have earned a high school diploma or equivalent.

In order to develop policy and to ensure investment in learning outcomes, the State of Oregon, through the Oregon Education Investment Board, has developed Achievement Compacts for those educational entities that receive state funds. During the 2012 Oregon Legislative Session, HB 4059 was passed directing the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to carry out goals related to Credit for Prior Learning. This focus on recognizing the value of prior knowledge and experience emphasizes how helping students progress from noncredit to credit learning is not only key to student success but also a vital component of reaching Oregon's 40-40-20 Goal.

Building on the findings of national research, local community college policy and practice and statewide partnerships are essential in helping students progress to completion. Recognizing that "Credit for Prior Learning" encompasses a wide variety of definitions, for purposes of this report, "Credit for Prior Learning" shall use the language adopted in HB 4059 and be defined as the "knowledge and skills gained through work and life experience, through military training and experience and through formal and informal education and training from institutions of higher education in the United States and in other nations"

The exploration of Oregon Noncredit to Credit Student Progression

The exploration of noncredit to credit student progression began during the 2007 Oregon Legislative Session. During that session, a budget note was attached to the budget of the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD) requesting that CCWD disaggregate its Key Performance Measure data by college. Recognizing this as an opportunity to intentionally examine student success in Oregon, Commissioner Camille Preus convened the Student Success Steering Committee.

The work of the Steering Committee resulted in the Oregon Community College Student Success Plan, *Measure What You Treasure*. The plan guided the intentional efforts of colleges to improve and enhance academic experiences and success rates of Oregon's community college students. Three issues emerged within the report pertaining to noncredit workforce instruction:

1. Significant numbers of students enroll in noncredit classes. In Oregon, noncredit students represent over one-third of community college student headcount. Yet, few policymakers knew about this program area or recognized its value.
2. Noncredit class outcomes are not adequately assessed by statewide performance measures. Understanding performance patterns in these classes will help colleges better articulate the value of noncredit workforce instruction and improve student success.
3. Better connections are needed between noncredit workforce classes and credit classes and credentials. Developing these connections will allow more Oregonians to earn credits and credentials.

This plan and the efforts surrounding its implementation are now known as the Student Success Initiative. The activities and conversations surrounding the Student Success Initiative are guided and informed by the Student Success Oversight Committee (SSOC).

In order to improve the connection of noncredit workforce courses to credits, credentials and other student outcomes, Commissioner Preus convened the Noncredit Task Force (NCTF) in fall 2008. The NCTF reviewed the status of Oregon community college policies and practices regarding noncredit and how they related to national trends. In the spring of 2009, the following five policy recommendations were shared with the SSOC and the State Board of Education:

Promote state funding

- Keep the current Oregon funding practice of treating all classes equally.
- Explore the need for an “investment” fund for noncredit workforce classes.

Increase coordination between noncredit and credit

- Explore the connections of noncredit to credit and collect examples of success.

Assessment, articulation and transfer

- Connect the noncredit classes to the top 20 jobs from the Oregon Employment Department and the *Skills2Compete* report.

Portability and validation of noncredit

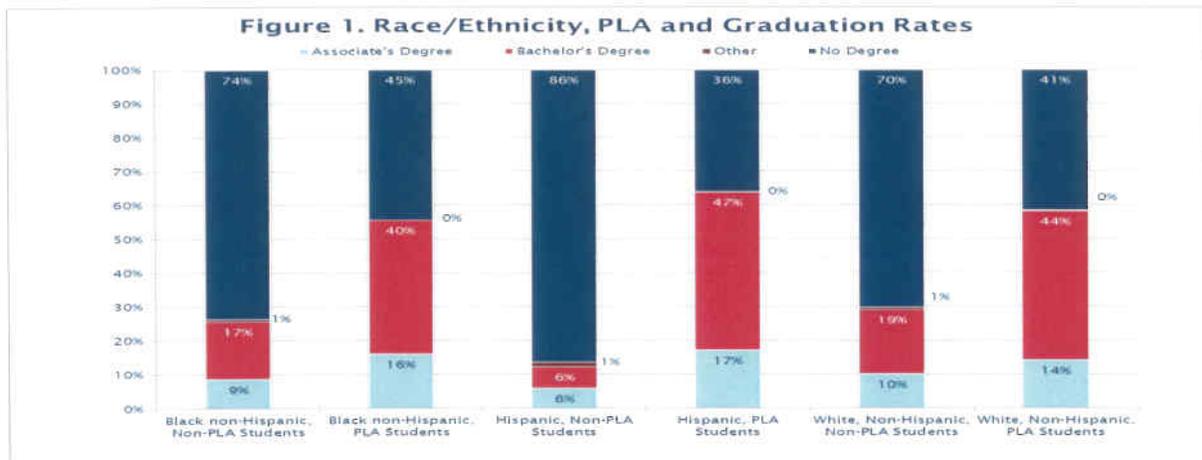
- Increase transcription of noncredit classes as a way to create portability.

Collect more information on outcomes

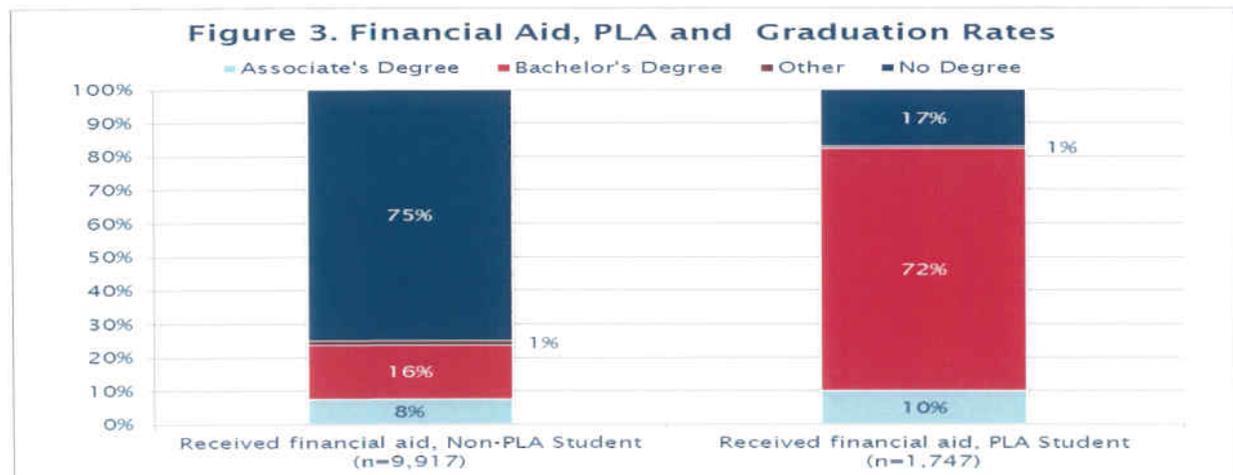
- Improve data collection of noncredit students and develop outcome measures.

In an effort to explore connections and recognize that each of Oregon’s 17 community colleges have isolated but innovative connections from noncredit to credit, the NCTF developed the Oregon Noncredit to Credit Framework and Models. The Framework and Models build on the Business Roundtable Framework (2010) and includes examples, best practices, future steps and measurements of success in four areas: Curriculum, Credit for Prior Experience, Credit for Prior Learning and Credit for Prior Credential/Certification.

In collaboration with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), and through the strategic investment by Commissioner Camille Preus, the NCTF brought together representatives from Oregon’s community colleges for a day-long summit to take an in-depth look at each of the four model areas and connect Oregon’s work in the area of noncredit to credit student progression with those of other states. During the summit, participants were given the opportunity to provide their recommendations regarding potential next steps for Oregon’s noncredit to credit student progression work. Information shared with the group included statistics from the CAEL research brief “Underserved Students Who Earn Credit Through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Have Higher Degree Completion Rates and Shorter Time-to-Degree (2011)”. The NCTF identified the significance of outcomes associated with low-income students and students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds on Oregon community college student progression and completion. For example, CAEL reported that graduation rates for associate’s degrees nearly tripled for Hispanic students who received credit for prior learning. This study reported increases in graduation rates for all students who received credit for prior learning as compared to those who did not.



Source: *Underserved Students Who Earn Credit Through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Have Higher Degree Completion Rates and Shorter Time-to-Degree (2011)*.



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A review of several states revealed promising practices in the area of noncredit to credit progression and completion. States exemplifying these practices include Tennessee, Vermont and Pennsylvania. These states go on to provide examples of the importance of partnerships with public and private entities which have proven to be instrumental in this work across the country by increasing the capacity for the development of systems and policies to support this work.

Tennessee is a 2011 Complete College America grant recipient. This award was funded through support by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Tennessee looks to “expand and elevate prior learning assessment (PLA) to the state level by developing guidelines for widely-used, effective programs, training faculty and advisors, and utilizing the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning’s (CAEL) LearningCounts.org Virtual PLA Center.”

For over 25 years Vermont has fostered the policy and practice of encouraging students to document and earn credit for prior learning including challenge exams and portfolio assessments. The Prior Learning Assessment process which is completed through the Community College of Vermont, results in credits that are transferable to any Vermont college or university that accepts experiential learning credits.

In Pennsylvania, the use of a portal makes transfer policies and opportunities for credit for prior learning transparent. Oversight of the Prior Learning Assessment Guidelines is conducted by a group of private and public postsecondary institutions who comprise the Pennsylvania Prior Learning Assessment Consortium. Information is provided through the portal and is divided into topic areas specifically designed for students and administrators.

The examination of noncredit to credit student progression and completion revealed areas in which data collection among the colleges could be improved. Building on the practices and procedures of LearningCounts.org and through conversations with multiple stakeholder groups, the NCTF found that standardization and increased collection of data in the following areas is necessary to learn more about Oregon community college students’ journey from noncredit to credit bearing classes:

- which classes are colleges granting credit for prior learning, experience or credential;
- the number of credits awarded for these courses; and
- the manner in which the credit was awarded (e.g. College-Level Examination Program, portfolio processes, or American Council on Education transcription)

Recommended Next Steps for Oregon’s Community Colleges

The NCTF believes that it is in the student’s best interest to participate in a uniform process that allows credit to be granted by a community college and accepted at all Oregon community colleges. This process should be designed in partnership with the Oregon University System and be inclusive of students who wish to transfer to a four-year university. Oregon has already participated in such partnerships regarding Applied Baccalaureate Degrees, International Baccalaureate and College-Level Examination Programs. Strong partnerships between Lane Community College and the University of Oregon as well as Linn-Benton Community College

and Oregon State University are examples of successful degree partnerships. Such partnerships lay the groundwork for conversations in the area of noncredit to credit student progression and completion.

Building on the research and collaborative discussions with Oregon community college staff, faculty and administration, the Noncredit Task Force makes the following recommendations regarding noncredit to credit student progression for Oregon:

- Improve and increase data collection on noncredit to credit student progression areas;
- Continue funding and support for programs such as Oregon Pathways to Adult Basic Skills (OPABS) and Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL);
- Adopt standards for assessing learning modeled after CAEL's Standards for Assessing Learning;
- Develop partnerships between colleges and students to avoid risk of duplication of credit and assist in certificate and degree completion, and
- Maintain alignment with the Northwest Commission for Colleges and Universities Accreditation Standards.

Oregon Community College Noncredit to Credit Task Force Membership:

- Andrea Newton (Lane Community College) representing Career and Technical Education Leaders
- Art Hill (Blue Mountain Community College) representing Business and Industry Training Sectors
- Carol Schaafsma (Linn-Benton Community College) representing Council of Instructional Administrators
- Craig Kolins (Portland Community College- Southeast/Extended Learning Campus) representing Oregon Presidents Council
- Karen Sanders (Portland Community College- District Office) representing Adult Basic Skills Directors
- Minna Gelder (Chemeketa Community College) representing Oregon Community College Registrars
- Pamela Murray (Portland Community College – Extended Learning Campus) representing Community College Workforce Strategies
- Suzanne Burd (Columbia Gorge Community College) representing Continuing Education
- Phillip King (Clackamas Community College) representing Community College Student Services Administrators
- John Hamblin (Lane Community College) representing Oregon Community College Registrars
- Donna Lewelling representing Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development.

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