

Docket Item:

HECC Accelerated Learning Standards Implementation Update

Summary:

HECC staff has analyzed the Willamette Promise's request to temporarily suspend the state requirement that colleges and universities use a special transcript notation to denote credits earned by high school students through an innovative approach to dual credit known as "Assessment Based Learning (ABL)." All partners agree that seamless credit transfer is an important objective but disagree about whether course equivalency has been sufficiently established. While agreeing that this is an urgent issue for higher education institutions to address, HECC staff recommends maintaining the current standards pending the outcome of further review of Willamette Promise by Oregon State University and the HECC-sponsored Oversight Committee established to ensure alignment and transferability.

Docket Material:

Background

The Willamette Promise is a partnership between mid-Willamette Valley school districts, the Willamette Education Service District (ESD), and several higher education institutions (including Western Oregon University and Oregon Tech) that allows students to earn college credits for high school-based courses (i.e. accelerated learning). Willamette Promise employs an approach that relies more heavily than traditional dual credit models on assessments of student learning and faculty partnerships to achieve equivalency, and there are other differences. Willamette Promise's approach seeks to align with the new Assessment-Based Learning (ABL) strand of standards for High School Based College Credit Partnerships that the HECC adopted in mid-2016. Among other things, the HECC's ABL standards require the college that awards ABL credit to include a special notation on the student transcript denoting that the credits were earned through this approach.

Willamette Promise leaders have expressed significant concern that some students who earn ABL credit struggle to transfer that credit effectively to the university where they eventually matriculate. Specifically, they note that Oregon State University does not regard all ABL courses as fully equivalent to OSU-based courses, and is choosing to count many ABL credits as satisfying elective requirements. As a

result, Willamette Promise argues that the HECC should suspend its requirement that ABL credits receive a special transcript notation requirement for several terms while new articulation agreements are negotiated. Willamette Promise argues that students have been, and will be in the future, adversely affected by the notation because those notated credits will be treated differently than other forms of transfer credit. All partners agree that seamless transfer is critical for higher education affordability.

The HECC's Oversight Committee for High School Based College Credit Partnerships was created to oversee the implementation of the Dual Credit, Sponsored Dual Credit, and Assessment Based Learning Standards. The goal of the Oversight Committee is to achieve student mobility and transparency by requiring, at the state level, adherence to specific standards that maintain equal rigor across all categories of accelerated learning credits. The logic embedded in the standards recognizes variance among course sections offered on campus, and that the academic programs, "wherever offered and however delivered," could have the same level of variability as course sections within that department or institution. In cases where the "conduct of the courses" is substantially different, a special transcript notation is required. The academic catalog for the institution dictates the courses and intended delivery of those courses.

Through a process of self-study and peer review, the HECC's Oversight Committee will examine and approve proposed high school-based college credit partnerships against the HECC's adopted standards. The first round of these reviews and approvals will take place in 2018. Participating institutions -- including WOU in the first round -- will submit a self-study that provides evidence of alignment between the institutional and high school-based courses, and provides narrative, artifacts, and data that support the design and delivery of high school based college credit partnerships. HECC staff will facilitate the online peer review by educators around the state and report back to Western Oregon University in early fall, 2018 with the results. The Oversight Committee will be responsible for the final evaluation and approval. Each public institution follows initial approval with a 3-year update and a re-application for approval after 6 years.

Process and Transparency

The process of self-study and peer review is expected to increase dialogue and collaboration among education partners, and in doing so, ensure transparency and student mobility. Transparency is important in multiple areas. First, by establishing evidence of alignment between high school and college campus course offerings, post-secondary institutions will be able to provide substantiated answers to questions of alignment and transferability to fellow universities and colleges. Second, when assessment based learning credit is transcribed, all universities and community

colleges are notating the credit on student transcripts so that the receiving institution knows what type of credit was awarded. Third, when the partnership knows where and how the college credit it generates is articulated, then the partnership can provide the most accurate information to students and families about the credits and how students can expect to use them later on.

The process of developing the state standards for Dual Credit (adopted in 2010 and revised in 2014), Sponsored Dual Credit, and Assessment Based Learning Credit included workgroup participation in 13 day-long meetings over 14 months and extensive sharing and gathering of feedback from numerous participants, including 12 stakeholder meetings between July 2015 and March 2016. The investment in time, partner relationships, and transparent processes to promote academic rigor was invaluable in assuring recognition of the standards. Staff recommend that any changes to the requirements in the standards engage the Oversight Committee and a broad process of stakeholder engagement in order to preserve that investment.

Commitment to Equity

The state of Oregon supports and encourages Accelerated Learning in general and High School Based College Credit Partnerships in particular because they are research-proven, data-driven strategies or “interventions” that help high school students navigate the transition to colleges and universities. College in the high school is especially valuable when it serves as a bridge to postsecondary degrees for first generation students and other under-represented groups in higher education.

During the self-study and peer review process, secondary and postsecondary partners evaluate data about the student populations their programs serve and strategize about how to improve access, success, and outcomes. Partners have the opportunity to design and make explicit the program elements that have the greatest impact on student success, and to position their practices within the framework and goals of the standards. Credits with a purpose and educational equity are the principles that guide the design, review, and approval of high school based college credit partnerships in Oregon.

Revision of the standards

The State Standards for High School Based College Credit Partnerships will be subject to periodic review and revision. This revision is scheduled to take place as soon as the academic year 2018-2019 and take effect the following year in 2019-2020. The review and revision of our state standards provides a regularly occurring opportunity to review and revise the requirements to best achieve our shared goals. The review will occur with data and evidence at hand including critical input from the first cycle of

self-study and peer review participants. Decisions to revise the standards shall be based on strategic collaboration between schools, universities, and community colleges.

Common Statewide Notation

On September 7th 2017, an ad-hoc group of campus representatives shared information around implementation of the required transcript note. Campus representatives recommend a common transcript notation for ABL credit. The final recommendation is to be announced this winter. A common notation practice will ensure receiving institutions can identify ABL programming with the statewide standards.

Staff Recommendation:

In order to achieve our shared goals for a seamless transfer between education sectors, and in support of the value that ABL offers as an innovative structural reform with potential to benefit all students, staff recommend that the HECC make no change to the standards or their requirements this year, even temporarily or for one institution only. Staff cautions against the unintended consequences of abrupt removal of the notation requirement and instead recommends a deliberate and gradual approach to adjusting statewide requirements, as defined by the self-study and peer review process.

The identification of Assessment Based Learning credit on college or university transcripts is required under the state standards adopted in 2016. The implementation of the standards has an inbuilt process for review and revision (described above). Staff recommends that the Commission strongly encourage faculty from all institutions, especially Oregon State University and any others with concerns about ABL credit, to participate in the peer review process.

Finally, staff recommends that the Commission request Willamette Promise and OSU to provide an update in May, 2018 on progress to support recent and current Willamette Promise students who have matriculated or intend to matriculate at OSU. Progress should be made in ensuring that these students are earning useful post-secondary credit through their Willamette Promise courses, and not excess or lost credit. At that time, upon assessing impact on student academic trajectories, the Commission may re-consider Willamette Promise's request to adjust language in the statewide standards.