

CONSENT ITEM (25-04-17)

Date: April 10, 2025

Tab 4

Whatcom Community College - Proposed Bachelor of Science in Computer Science

Brief Description

In September 2014, the State Board adopted a revised approval process, selection criteria, and application materials for community and technical colleges seeking to offer an applied baccalaureate program. In 2021, the State Board's authority was expanded to include Bachelor of Science degree programs in computer science. The final step in the approval process requires State Board action on the college's application to offer the proposed bachelor's degree.

How does this item link to the State Board's Strategic Plan?

In June 2023, the State Board adopted an updated strategic plan, which focuses on four goals: increase access and retention among populations who can benefit the most from college; improve completion and transfer rates for students across all program types; provide flexible career-training options that are responsive to the needs of businesses and industries; and secure resources and develop systemwide strategies to support colleges' financial sustainability and resiliency. Colleges offering baccalaureate degrees meet the needs of changing economies by increasing the number of skilled employees in the areas of greatest demand. Through bachelor level degrees, colleges create greater access to higher education by enrolling underserved populations, particularly place-bound working adults, and ensure community and technical colleges are affordable and accessible for students. Community and technical college bachelor's degree programs provide access for students who have been historically underserved by and had limited access to bachelor's-level education. They also meet the local workforce needs and allow students to remain in their home communities.

Background information and analysis

Whatcom Community College seeks to expand capacity in Northwest Washington with their proposed Bachelor of Science in Computer Science program, which was designed with input and review from faculty in the department of computer science at neighboring Western Washington University in addition to local industry professionals contributing input in an advisory role.

The proposed program seeks to serve students who are pursuing or have earned an Associate in Arts and Science DTA with a focus in Computer Science (transfer degree). Students who earn the AAS-DTA are positioned and prepared to transfer to a university to pursue studies in computer science or continue forward into the BS Computer Science program at Whatcom Community College. The program design allows students to have agency and flexibility to select the academic path they desire and provide an additional option as university CS programs have been capacity constrained.

Highlighted in the program proposal, a key to the program's success in terms of fulfilling its mission

and meeting its outcomes is a focus on building relationships. To broaden participation, the program plan includes outreach to local and regional high schools as well as connecting with students at Whatcom Community College who are engaged in recently introduced courses that are focused on applied learning and community engagement (and may have not yet decided on an academic or career pathway). The program is connecting with community and industry partners to foster opportunities for students to build practical experience through in-program internships and community projects where they can apply their technical skills to solve relevant and practical problems. Whatcom Community College will be working with public and independent colleges and universities to develop articulation agreements to facilitate opportunities for students to pursue graduate studies in computer science, software engineering, data science, cybersecurity, and other related master's degree programs.

The Statement of Need for the BS Computer Science was presented by Whatcom Community College at the May 2024 board meeting. If approved, this program will be Whatcom Community College's fourth bachelor's degree offering.

Recommendation/preferred result

These proposals meet criteria established by statute and Board policy based on staff review and feedback from peer reviewers from the community and technical college system. Staff recommends State Board action on the following:

- Resolution 25-04-17 approving Whatcom Community College's Bachelor of Science in Computer Science

Policy Manual Change Yes ☐ No ☒

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STATE OF WASHINGTON
STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES
RESOLUTION 25-04-17

A resolution to approve Whatcom Community College's application to offer a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science upon recommendation of the State Board for Community and Technical College staff.

WHEREAS, Substitute Senate Bill 5401, passed by the 2021 Washington State Legislature, authorizes the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to approve bachelor of science degree programs in computer science offered by community and technical colleges; and

WHEREAS, consistent with the Washington State Legislature's requirement, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges developed objective criteria for the approval of community and technical college applied baccalaureate degrees; and

WHEREAS, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges staff found that Whatcom Community College's application provided evidence that met or exceeded all objective selection criteria and will expand baccalaureate degree capacity in the state;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges approves the recommendation to authorize Whatcom Community College's Bachelor of Science in Computer Science;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges authorizes the Executive Director to make adjustments to this action, including any necessary changes to the state board's policy manual, as necessary, for actions taken by the Governor, Legislature, data corrections, externally imposed restrictions or guidelines, uniform accounting and reporting requirements, and unanticipated changes in state or federal law.

APPROVED AND ADOPTED on April 10, 2025

Attest



Chris Bailey, interim secretary



Martin Valadez, chair