

CONSENT ITEM (RESOLUTION 25-10-43)

October 16, 2025

Tab 4

Proposed Revision to the Baccalaureate Program Approval Process

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, with a focus on colleges demonstrating capacity to build and sustain a program. In 2021, this process expanded to include an approval process for Bachelor of Science in Computer Science degrees. As of October 2025, the state board had approved over 170 bachelor's degree programs, located among all 34 community and technical colleges. With the milestone of all community and technical colleges in the system successfully demonstrating that they have the capacity to offer bachelor's degree programs, work commenced at the agency and in councils at the request of the state board to propose a revision to the approval process to (1) shift the focus from demonstrating a college's capacity to a focus on program quality and (2) streamline the process with the lessons learned through both research and experience over the past 10 years of using the existing (2014) process and offering baccalaureate programs to students.

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's 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

The state board is authorized to select and approve community and technical colleges to offer applied baccalaureate programs and bachelor of science in computer science programs through the Revised Code of Washington, RCW 28B.50.810 and RCW 28B.50.825, respectively, using objective criteria including, but not limited to (1) the college demonstrates the capacity to make a long-term commitment of resources to build and sustain a high quality program, (2) the college has or can readily engage faculty appropriately qualified to develop and deliver a high quality curriculum at the

baccalaureate level, (3) the college can demonstrate demand for the proposed program from a sufficient number of students within its service area to make the program cost-effective and feasible to operate, (4) the college can demonstrate that employers demand the level of technical training proposed within the program, making it cost-effective for students to seek the degree, and (5) the proposed program fills a gap in options available for students because it is not offered by a public four-year institution of higher education in the college's geographic area or if there is a shortage of programs demanded by industry and workforce.

The existing baccalaureate program approval process was originally developed and approved with the Higher Education Coordinating Board in 2010. The state board approved initial revisions to the process in February 2013, approved updates to the applied baccalaureate degree program approval process in September 2014, and extended the applied baccalaureate degree program approval process to include bachelor of science in computer science programs starting in 2021.

The September 2014 baccalaureate degree program approval process, approved and adopted via Resolution 14-09-59, included a strong focus on a statement of need for proposed programs and colleges demonstrating their capacity to build and sustain baccalaureate programs. Ten years later in October 2024, all 34 community and technical colleges had been approved by the state board to offer one or more bachelor's degree programs, with 169 approved programs in total across the system. At the state board's October 2024 study session, during the quarterly baccalaureate programs update, there was discussion among board members around evolving and streamlining the baccalaureate program approval process, shifting the focus from demonstrating capacity toward a focus on baccalaureate program quality.

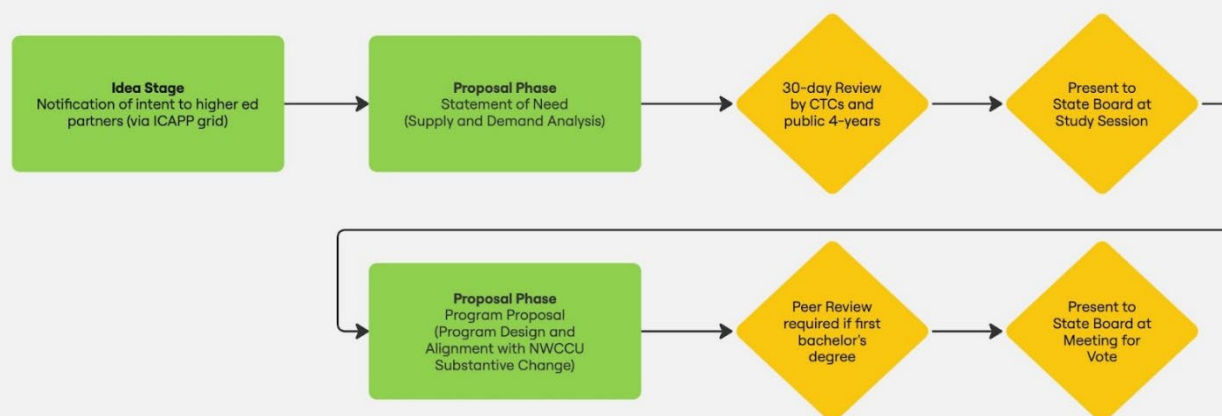
Research (Pawlicki et al., 2023) published by the Community College Baccalaureate Association (an affiliated council of the American Association of Community Colleges) identified nine elements of quality for community college baccalaureate programs, including: (1) high level of learning, (2) equitable access and outcomes, (3) affordability, (4) flexibility, (5) experiential learning, (6) employer/industry partnerships and collaboration, (7) student services, (8) regional significance and labor market alignment, and (8) evaluation: evidence-based programs and practices. This research served as guidance as the proposed revised baccalaureate program approval process was developed in the Baccalaureate Leadership Council (BLC), which reports to the Instruction Commission (IC), a commission of the Washington Association of Community and Technical Colleges (WACTC).

The proposed revisions to the baccalaureate program approval process were developed to meet the objective criteria stated in RCW 28B.50.810 and RCW 28B.50.825 and aligns with the Washington State Council of Presidents (COP), Interinstitutional Committee for Academic Program Planning (ICAPP) process. The ICAPP process that became effective on January 1, 2021 was adopted by the COP Interinstitutional Committee of Academic Officers and SBCTC Instruction Commission in December 2020. The purpose of ICAPP is to provide a forum for collegial discussion of degree development in Washington with the goal of increasing communication and awareness to ensure Washington's public colleges and universities meet both student and economic demands and minimize the potential duplication of state resources.

The diagram below provides a summary comparison of the existing (2014) and proposed (2025)

baccalaureate program approval processes, while details are provided in Attachment A.

Current Baccalaureate Program Approval Process (State Board Resolution 14-09-49, 09/10/2014)



Proposed Revision of Baccalaureate Program Approval Process (2025)



In the existing (2014) process, a proposed program from a college is presented to state board members twice at two separate meetings (study sessions): once to present the Statement of Need and once to present the Program Proposal. In the proposed (2025) process, the Program Proposal is intended to both demonstrate the need and document the program design and is presented to state board members once, after reviews have been completed by state board staff and peers in higher education. A summary of the changes in the required documentation for a baccalaureate program proposal is provided in Attachment B.

The proposed revisions to baccalaureate program approval process (detailed in Attachments A and B) were originally developed by in Baccalaureate Leadership Council's (BLC) Policy Workgroup and were presented to the members of the BLC in Winter 2025. BLC members brought the proposed process revisions to their campuses for review and voted in Spring 2025 to recommend the revised process to Instruction Commission (IC). The members of the Instruction Commission reviewed the recommendation from BLC and voted to approve the revised baccalaureate program approval process in Spring 2025.

Recommendation/preferred result

Staff recommends state board action on the following:

- Resolution 25-10-43 updating the baccalaureate degree program approval process

Policy Manual Change Yes ☒ No ☐

Prepared by: Kendrick Hang, Policy Associate for Baccalaureate Programs

360-704-3917, khang@sbctc.edu

STATE OF WASHINGTON

STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES

RESOLUTION 25-10-43

A resolution to update the baccalaureate degree program approval process, to include applied baccalaureate degree programs and bachelor of science in computer science programs, to supersede Resolution 14-09-59.

WHEREAS, Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 2483, passed by the 2012 Washington State Legislature, authorizes the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to approve all applied baccalaureate degree programs offered by community and technical colleges; and 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, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges approved an applied baccalaureate program approval process with the Higher Education Coordinating Board in 2010; approved initial revisions to the process in February 2013; updated the applied baccalaureate degree program approval process in September 2014; extended the applied baccalaureate degree program approval process to include bachelor of science in computer science programs starting in 2021; and

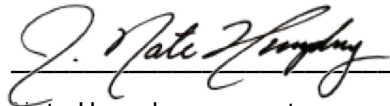
WHEREAS, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges wishes to maintain an efficient, streamlined process for approving baccalaureate degree programs with objective criteria that includes a strong focus on the elements of high-quality community and technical college baccalaureate programs.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges approves the revised baccalaureate degree program approval process (Attachment A);

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 October 16, 2025.

Attest

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nate Humphrey", written over a horizontal line.

Nate Humphrey, secretary

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin Valadez", written over a horizontal line.

Martin Valadez, chair