

## **Draft UEE Work Plan for 2007**

### **1. Alignment of Standards and Assessments**

The current focus on Oregon high school diploma requirements motivates joint work in all three sectors to define appropriate standards in core content areas, and to agree on suitable methods for assessing mastery. This work is already underway, and will be the responsibility of an Implementation Task Force, but it will be useful for UEE to consider priorities and identify key points where inter-sector collaboration is most needed.

### **2. Policy governing Accelerated Learning**

Oregon has many options for students to obtain post-secondary education while still in high school, and these excellent programs constitute an important way to strengthen preparation for college and the workforce. They also have the potential to keep our top high school graduates in Oregon. The “Running Start” program in Washington accomplishes this, and is well-known and admired nationally. To assure the same quality and attract the attention that Oregon’s programs deserve, policies governing their operation and quality need to be widely understood and embraced.

### **3. Pathways from High School to College, Technical Training, and Career**

In some ways, Oregon has become a victim of its own energy and imagination. We have many first-rate programs designed to help students move through various parts of the educational system, taking advantage of both academic and technical training opportunities in different sectors. Unfortunately, the proliferation of programs has created artificial barriers that side-track, or even stall, students. We need to make the system more navigable.

## 1. Alignment of Standards and Assessments

**Problem Statement:** Currently, the standards that govern the content of K-12 courses, especially high school courses, as well as the assessments used to gauge mastery of the material, do not consistently fit with college- and university-level expectations. As a result, some students find themselves taking multiple exams, whose relationships are unclear and whose value and purpose are not evident. This wastes valuable time and resources for students and institutions, and creates a disincentive for students to take assessments seriously.

**Proposed Solution:** The content standards and assessments used in K-12 should be more closely tied to course content and placement tests in post-secondary institutions. For instance, if common placement tests in core subjects such as writing and mathematics were used throughout Oregon for course work at the college freshman level, the degree of attainment necessary to cross the high school/college boundary would be apparent to everyone – students, parents, high school teachers and college/university faculty. Simplicity and coherence of this kind would clarify the expectations we have of students and would help to focus attention and resources where they are most needed. To create such a well-organized system, it is essential that college and university faculty work directly with K-12 teachers to consider course content and to ensure agreement on the utility of any assessments that are adopted. A fruitful place to begin would be the establishment of state-level policies that promote these interactions.

### **Work in Progress:**

- WestEd review of the Oregon K-12 content standards and assessments.
- WestEd review of the alignment of state assessment tests with Oregon K-12 content standards.
- Standardization of the amounts of academic credit awarded for specific scores on AP tests (SB342, Item f).
- Development and use of criteria for excellent college-level courses in General Education (SB342, Item c.).

### **Recommended Next Steps:**

1. Review current structures that contribute to alignment and identify gaps.
2. Coordinate work on standards and assessments by WestEd and by the Task Force charged with implementing the new high school diploma requirements.
3. Identify a few curricular areas of fundamental importance on which to focus a coordinated effort in all sectors. These areas could be math and/or writing, for example.

## 2. Policy Governing Accelerated Learning

**Problem Statement:** Oregon has many options for students to obtain post-secondary education while still in high school. Although some of these programs have existed for nearly 20 years, we lack a comprehensive understanding of them and we do not have a widely-embraced framework or policy that governs their operation and ensures quality.

**Background:** Although young people are entering college at increasingly high rates, many are under-prepared for the academic challenges they encounter. Accelerated learning opportunities for high school students are one means of increasing the effectiveness of college preparation. For students who are not college-bound, accelerated technical training in high school can open up apprenticeship and job opportunities and smooth the transition to the work place.

Some of the accelerated academic opportunities are in programs such as Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB), whose rigor is ensured through tight linkage to external objective assessment. Others are in programs that allow high school students to take courses, along with college students, on college or university campuses. Examples are UO's Duck-links and OSU's College Credit for High School Students. Still other opportunities are in dual credit programs that offer students college-level courses taught by qualified college- or university-approved high school teachers within high schools. Examples are the College Now Programs offered by many community colleges, SOU's Advanced Southern Credit Program, PSU's Challenge Program, and OIT's Advanced Credit Program. In addition to these academic options, there are also enriching opportunities in technical fields, including the Tech Prep federal initiative, which expands students' post-secondary educational opportunities. The most recent addition to the lineup is the Expanded Options Program, established by the 2005 Legislature in Senate Bill 300, which increases the likelihood that all students will have access to accelerated academic and professional/technical courses by requiring that high schools offer such opportunities and notify students of their eligibility.

### Questions:

1. What quality standards should be in place? For example,
  - What criteria should be used to ensure program quality? Are current criteria adequate? Are they applied effectively in all sectors?
  - What measures should be used to ensure student mastery of material at the appropriate level? (For instance, writing and math at the college level or technical skill at the proficiency level needed for practical use.)
2. What measures of program success should be used? For example,

- How should subsequent student success in related education or work be tracked?
- How should the results be used to improve programs and make programs accessible to more students?

3. What kind of framework is needed to guide high school students taking accelerated courses?

**Recommended Next Steps:**

1. Collect current policies governing accelerated learning programs in Oregon.
2. Identify the requirements for obtaining useful data on student success.
3. Collect exemplary policies used in other states -- for example, guidelines for the highly-regarded "Running Start" program in Washington and "Project Advance" at Syracuse University, as well as the requirements for accreditation by NACEP (National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships).
4. Engage stakeholders in a discussion of the requirements for program quality.

### 3. Pathways from High School to College, Technical Training, and Career

#### **Problem Statement:**

We need to communicate more clearly how students can best move from high school through different kinds of educational programs that will prepare them for the jobs and careers to which they aspire. We also need to show students whose post-secondary education does not follow directly after high school graduation how they can enter the educational system. For most students, there are multiple potential paths that are both efficient and educationally sound, but recognizing them is not trivial. A major problem is the complex terminology that has accumulated in all sectors of our educational system. Ironically, the development of programs designed to streamline the process has contributed its own vocabulary and thus enlarged the lexicon. It is understandable, therefore, that students, parents and educators are often confused and frustrated, and it's our responsibility to provide clarity.

#### **Background:**

The following are the kinds of well-intentioned programs and agreements that can cause confusion:

1. Articulation agreements between individual Oregon universities and community colleges. These agreements specify the coursework that can be transferred between a particular community college/university pair for credit toward a designated degree. The number of variants is large since the coursework appropriate for different degree programs in different schools varies greatly. In addition, some articulation agreements identify courses only, whereas others provide junior or sophomore standing, as well as courses.
2. "2+2" programs at community colleges and high schools. These programs specify a group of high school courses that allow high school juniors or seniors to enter a professional/technical program at a community college.
3. Workforce training courses and adult education. Recently, community colleges have begun identifying specific sets of courses that prepare adult students, and others in workforce training courses, for entry-level jobs that feed into career ladders.
4. Career Pathways programs. These programs help students link 2+2 programs and academic coursework with the workforce.
5. Skill Sets. These are defined by many different groups and are used as outcomes on which industry certification and licensure are commonly based.

**Possible solutions:** The nomenclature, expectations, and marketing of these programs are varied and confusing. One approach to making the range of options understandable and accessible to students is the ATLAS system that OUS is developing. When complete, this system will allow a student in any public community college or university within Oregon to match completed or contemplated coursework with specific degree or training programs at any other college or university. High school students will also be able to use the system to investigate the possible educational pathways that lie ahead of them.

ATLAS is not the entire solution, however. A complex issue that ATLAS does not address is the definition of “skill set” for the purpose of preparing students appropriately for the workforce. The difficulty is that multiple sets, which are related but not aligned, have been identified as the key skills by different constituencies. Which set(s) should Oregonian’s use for education and training? The following list illustrates the problem:

1. Local employers identify the skill sets that are needed for particular jobs.
2. The Oregon Employment Department has been working with employers who operate statewide to identify the skill sets they require.
3. Community college, university, business, and industry advisory panels have identified the skill sets needed by graduates of the 24 public institutions in Oregon.
4. Various workforce clusters and consortia have identified skill sets.
5. The federal government defines a group of skill sets whose development is eligible for support by federal workforce dollars.
6. National panels have set national skill standards for many technical careers.

**Questions:**

1. Can the purposes and nomenclature of these programs be clarified so that terms like “articulation agreement”, “pathway”, and “ 2+2 program”, are understandable to students, faculty and parents?
2. Is there alignment of degrees and certificates that allows students to progress steadily?

**Recommended Next Steps:**

1. Organize the current array of skill sets to identify common and distinctive elements.
2. Look for good practices from other states.
3. Engage skill sets stakeholders in an effort to identify the key technical skills that should be the focus of education and training.