



Description

Automatic certificate or degree awarding (auto-awarding) is a process by which Central Oregon Community College will automatically award degrees and/or certificates to students who have completed the requirements for their declared program of study. Currently, COCC requires that student apply for graduation, which is the College's 'signal' that students are close to graduation; an auto-awarding process eliminates this requirement. Instead, COCC will leverage technology via the College's current information systems to track progress and identify completers.

Background

In winter and spring 2013, the College led a campus wide process to identify and prioritize two to five student success initiatives aimed at making significant improvement in COCC credit student success benchmarks. Based on feedback from the campus, the campus identified three strategies: early enrollment deadlines and early interventions; first-year experience programs; and automatically awarding certificates and degrees to students as they earn them.

With the advent of career pathways and short-term certificates, many institutions recently shifted the practice of automatically awarding from the student's "end" certificate or degree to automatically awarding certificates at various points along that path. The rationale behind this is supported by research indicating that if students reach a specific milestone (e.g., a short-term certificate), s/he is more likely to achieve the next milestone (e.g., a degree). This applies to both CTE programs as well as the Oregon transfer module (OTM) and associate of arts – Oregon transfer (AAOT) degree. Additionally, research indicates that automatically awarding certificates or degrees without having the student apply increases an institution's completion rates. Central Oregon Community College will explore this functionality to support student and institutional completion goals.

Task Force Charge

The charge for this task force is to develop a plan and implement a process to automatically award COCC certificates and degrees. Considerations include how and when COCC will award certificates and degrees, identify policy or practice impacts, communication needs and resource (staff, budget, technology, etc.) needs.

Timeline

While ideally, the task force will make significant progress towards an implementation *plan* by the middle to end of spring 2014, work can continue into fall term as need be. The hope is that each task force can provide a report to the campus on the task force's intended direction, as well as an opportunity for feedback, prior to many faculty and staff leaving for summer term. However, it is important to note that work can continue into fall 2014 as needed, with a final implementation plan due by end of fall 2014.

Task Force Membership

- Director of Admissions/Registrar (Courtney Ford)

- Assistant Director of Curriculum & Technology (John Armour)
- Faculty Representative, preferably CTE (Nick Sphatt)
- Student Module Manager (Chris Mills)
- Assistant Director of Admissions & Records (Jason Frost)
- Transcript & Degree Evaluators (Nancy Butler and Denise Hatch)
- Financial Aid Representative (Pam Beyer)

Implementation Questions and Considerations

Policy Questions and Considerations

1. What institutional policies or procedures present unnecessary barriers, delays, or conflicts within automatic certificate or degree awarding?
2. COCC currently requires that CTE program directors review and sign off on all CTE certificates and degrees. Is this practice still needed? What should the faculty (or advisor or program director) role be?
 - a. PCC sends lists of CTE students near completion to CTE advisors. Should COCC do that? Should COCC include students' remaining requirements?
 - b. How will course substitutions be processed?
3. Should COCC phase in the auto awarding process for various certificate or degree options (OTM, CTE certificates, CTE degrees, ASOT, AAOT)?
4. How will COCC process and communicate with those students seeking degrees/certificates outside of their declared program of study?
5. Should COCC allow students the opportunity to "opt-out" of earning the certificate or degree or should it be awarded regardless of student intent? What tracking mechanisms are needed for this?
 - a. Process opt-out requests by changing the program of study?
6. How can COCC encourage students to more accurately declare their intended certificate or degree?
7. As part of a statewide effort, COCC participated in Project Win-Win which automatically awarded the AAOT degree to students who earned the degree but never requested it. Once COCC's auto-awarding process is operational, should the College identify previous students who have completed a certificate or degree (in any area, not just the AAOT) but didn't apply for degree?

Process Questions and Considerations

1. What DegreeWorks, Banner and Argos functionality exists to identify completers and near-completers?
2. Need to analyze and map the current workflow process for awarding certificates and degrees; this includes task sequence, stakeholder actions and responsibilities, and timeline. What aspects of this process need to be modified to support auto-awarding? Do different process requirements exist for different certificate or degree types? For students who are pursuing multiple certificates or degrees? For students who choose to opt-out?
3. Need to develop communication plan for students, advisors and staff.
4. Need to identify all resources and documents which need to be updated in light of new process (catalog, print and email communications, etc.)

Current Practice

The following Oregon community colleges currently have a policy/practice by which they automatically award certificates or degrees, and may serve as a resource to this task force:

- Columbia Gorge Community College
- Portland Community College
- Klamath Community College
- Chemeketa Community College
- Rogue Community College