



## What is the CORE Initiative?

Each year, many students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs are forced to pause or discontinue their postsecondary education because of circumstances beyond their control. The Colorado Re-Engaged (CORE) Initiative enables four-year higher education institutions in Colorado to award an earned associate degree to eligible students who have stopped-out of a bachelor's program after earning at least 70 credit hours. See the question below for additional eligibility requirements.



For more information about CORE, visit <https://cdhe.colorado.gov/core-initiative>

## What are the eligibility requirements to receive an associate degree under CORE?

**To be eligible to receive an associate degree under CORE, an individual must meet all requirements listed below:**

- Earned 70 or more credit hours (credits can be from multiple institutions).
- At least 18 credit hours must be from the four-year university that will award the associate degree. These 18 credits must be earned “in residence” from the university – meaning they can’t be credits that were transferred into the university.
- The individual must have been un-enrolled from the four-year university for at least the last two consecutive semesters. Only fall and spring semesters count towards this required period of non-enrollment.
- The individual must have stopped-out within the last 10 years. Stated another way, the former student can have stopped out from the awarding institution no more than 20 semesters prior to the current semester.
- An individual who is eligible for an associate degree under Colorado’s existing Reverse Transfer program cannot also be eligible for an associate degree under the CORE Initiative. A student who is otherwise eligible for the CORE program but who earned 15 or more credits at a Colorado community college prior to enrolling in a four-year university would be eligible for an associate degree from their previous community college under Reverse Transfer.
- At least 15 of the student’s credits must be from completing state-recognized general education courses with a grade of C- or higher. Participating institutions may also specify, within the 15 general education credits, the number and type of credits required by category. For example: written communications credits, mathematics credits, natural and physical sciences credits, etc.
- Each participating institution of higher education has the option to establish additional “local” requirements for courses or credits beyond those listed above.

## What type of associate degree will I receive?

All four-year universities participating in the CORE program can award an associate of general studies degree to students who qualify. Currently, Colorado State University-Pueblo and the University of Northern Colorado also have authority to award an associate of arts degree. Eligibility for an associate of arts requires the former student to have completed at least 31 credits from [Colorado’s Guaranteed Transfer Pathways \(GT Pathways\) curriculum](#) -- compared to the 15 general education credits required for an associate of general studies.

## Which four-year universities are participating in the CORE program?

Participation in the CORE Initiative is voluntary on the part of Colorado's public four-year universities. As of December 2023, the following public four-year universities have joined the CORE Initiative and have authority to award associate degrees to eligible former students:

- Colorado State University – Fort Collins
- Colorado State University – Pueblo
- Fort Lewis College
- Metropolitan State University of Denver
- University of Colorado – Denver
- University of Colorado – Colorado Springs
- University of Northern Colorado

Please note that some public universities are not eligible to participate in CORE. This is typically because the institution already has the authority to award both bachelor's and associate degrees (known as a dual mission institution).

These institutions include:

- Adams State University
- Colorado Mountain College
- Colorado Mesa University (through its two-year institution, CMU Tech)

For contact information at each of these institutions, please visit <https://cdhe.colorado.gov/core-initiative>

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## How will I be notified if I am eligible?

Participating universities will each have their own process for identifying and notifying former students who may be eligible for an associate degree under the CORE Initiative. Typically, participating institutions will review academic records once or twice per academic year (end of the academic year and/or end of the fall term). If it is determined that you meet all the eligibility criteria, your former four-year university will attempt to contact you using the phone number, email address, and/or physical address they have on file for you. This notification should include information on the next steps you should take if you wish to receive your associate degree.

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## What should I do if I think I meet the eligibility requirements, but I have not been notified?

If you believe you have met all eligibility requirements for the CORE program, you can contact the university you previously attended and ask for a review of your transcript. For contact information at each of these institutions, please visit <https://cdhe.colorado.gov/core-initiative>

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## What if I am eligible, but do not want to receive my associate degree?

Awarding of an associate degree to an eligible former student **is not** automatic. If you are determined to be eligible for an associate degree under CORE, you will be contacted and asked to "opt-in" before you can receive your degree. There are certain circumstances when receiving your associate degree might not be your best option. An advisor from your former university can help you understand any potential drawbacks to receiving your degree.

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## Will I need to re-enroll in my previous college to receive my associate degree?

No, you do not need to re-enroll in your previous college to receive your associate degree. Associate degrees under the CORE Initiative are awarded **in recognition of courses and credits already completed** by students who were pursuing a bachelor's degree but had to pause or discontinue their postsecondary education by circumstances beyond their control.

It is important to note that CORE-eligible individuals can re-enroll (in their previous university or any bachelor's degree granting university) and continue working towards a bachelor's degree – whether they chose to receive their associate degree or not. Many public universities in Colorado offer special advising and other supports to individuals looking to re-enroll in post-secondary education.

## What if I am only a few credits short of the 70 credits required for an associate degree under CORE?

If you return to your previous four-year institution and complete these remaining credits, the CORE eligibility requirements state you would then need to be out of enrollment for a year or more (two consecutive semesters) before you could be eligible for the CORE program. A CORE associate degree is intended to provide a “best available option” for students who were making progress toward a bachelor’s degree but had to pause or discontinue their postsecondary education by circumstances beyond their control.



If you do wish to re-enroll and continue your postsecondary education, an advisor from your former institution – or any postsecondary institution – should be able to provide information about your options for earning a bachelor’s degree or other credential.

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## How is CORE different from Colorado’s Reverse Transfer program?

While both programs require the student to have earned 70 or more credits, [Reverse Transfer](#) is an option for students who earned 15 or more credits at a community college before transferring to a four-year university. The CORE Initiative is for students who either *only* attended a four-year university or transferred to a four-year university after earning *less than* 15 credits at a community college.

Another difference between the two programs is the type of institution that can award the associate degree. Associate degrees under CORE are conferred by the four-year institution attended, while associate degrees under Reverse Transfer are conferred by the student’s community college.

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## How would an associate degree potentially benefit me?

In terms of employability and income potential, [state](#) and [national](#) data indicate an associate degree is more valuable than having only a high school diploma or having some college but no degree. CORE associate degrees are not intended to be a replacement for, or equivalent to, a bachelor’s degree, but they can provide measurable benefits to the students who earn them. On average, individuals with an associate degree have higher annual earnings, lower rates of unemployment and access to more high-quality employment opportunities than those with only a high school diploma.

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## Can I enroll in a participating four-year university with the intent of earning an associate degree?

No. The associate degrees under the CORE Initiative are only awarded in recognition of academic credits already earned by students who were enrolled in a baccalaureate program but stopped-out before completing a bachelor’s degree. The statute that created the CORE Initiative stipulates that participating four-year institutions cannot offer programs designed to lead to an associate degree and cannot enroll students with the intent of obtaining an associate degree.

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## For More Information

<https://cdhe.colorado.gov/core-initiative>

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