



Colorado Re-Engaged (CORE) Initiative

Overview

The Colorado Re-Engaged (CORE) Initiative ([SB 21-1330](#)) enables four-year higher education institutions in Colorado to award an earned associate degree to eligible students who have stopped-out of a baccalaureate program. To be eligible, a student must have earned at least 70 credit hours (including completion of institutionally defined general education requirements for an associate degree) and must not have been enrolled for at least two consecutive semesters.

These former students have invested a significant amount of time and money to advance their knowledge and skills through higher education, but do not have an academic credential to reflect this investment. Awarding an earned associate degree in recognition of academic credits already completed can boost an individual's earning potential, open new employment opportunities, and increase the likelihood that an individual will return to higher education and complete a bachelor's degree. Detailed guidelines and recommendations regarding the CORE Initiative can be found [here](#).

Responses to common concerns for 4-year institutions considering participation in the CORE Initiative

1. *How do we implement this program if we do not have the resources to operationalize the CORE Initiative on our campus?*

Using funding from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), the Colorado Department of Higher Education offers operational grants of up to \$40,000 to each institution that commits to participating in the CORE Initiative ([the grant application form can be found here](#)). Grant funds can cover a range of CORE-related expenses during the 2022-23 academic year including building new associate degrees in the degree audit system and/or student information system, developing data queries to identify stop-out students who meet CORE eligibility requirements, and printing and mailing new diplomas. In addition, CDHE will pay all fees associated with applying for authorization to award associate degrees through the institution's accrediting agency. CDHE will also provide centralized marketing and outreach support for the CORE Initiative at no cost to participating institutions.

2. *How do we participate without competing with community colleges in our area?*

The underlying statute and guidelines from the CORE Working Group establish program boundaries designed to limit competition for enrollment and tuition revenue between four-year and two-year institutions.

- 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 market to or enroll students with the intent of obtaining an associate degree.
- Students who earned 15 or more academic credits from a two-year institution before transferring to a four-year institution are ineligible to participate in CORE. Instead, they may qualify for an associate degree from the two-year institution they previously attended through Colorado's existing Reverse Transfer Program.

3. *Won't giving students the option to receive an associate degree after earning 70 credit hours discourage them from completing a bachelor's degree?*

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 discontinue their education due to life circumstances including financial hardship, family obligations, changes in employment, health issues, negative impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and other issues. In addition to benefitting the student, awarding an earned associate degree can provide the institution with a powerful tool to encourage re-engagement by increasing an individual’s earning potential, providing an academic credential of value, and helping the individual understand their options for continuing their educational journey to an even more valuable bachelor’s degree. As the name implies, re-engagement is a central objective of the Colorado Re-Engaged Initiative.

It is important to note that, under the statute, a four-year institution participating in CORE cannot allow a student to enroll with the intent of obtaining an associate degree. Nor can a four-year institution offer programs designed to lead to associate degrees. The statute recognizes that obtaining a bachelor’s degree is the optimal outcome for students who enrolled in a baccalaureate program, but also recognizes that many students are forced to pause or discontinue their postsecondary education by circumstances beyond their control.

4. *What if, by awarding associate degrees, we diminish our reputation as a four-year institution or lessen the perceived value of our baccalaureate degrees?*

The statute which created the CORE Initiative states, “an institution that chooses to participate in the CORE initiative shall not allow a student to enroll in the institution to obtain an associate degree and shall not offer programs that are designed to lead to associate degrees.” The intent of the legislation is not to encourage four-year institutions to “get into the associate degree business” by developing new courses or programs that lead to an associate degree. In contrast, 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 at the awarding institution. Rather than diminishing the value of the institution’s bachelor’s degree offerings, the CORE Initiative provides those students who have stopped out of a baccalaureate program with an opportunity to re-engage and complete a bachelor’s degree.

Another factor is the relatively small number of students who will be eligible for, and ultimately receive, an associate degree from the institution in comparison to the number of bachelor’s degrees awarded by the institution each year.

5. *Will an associate degree benefit these students?*

In terms of employability and income potential, an abundance of [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.

For more information visit:

<https://cdhe.colorado.gov/students/attending-college/colorado-re-engaged-core-initiative>

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For More Information

Colorado Department of Higher Education <https://higher.ed.colorado.gov/>

Colorado Rises: Advancing Education and Talent Development <http://masterplan.highered.colorado.gov/>

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