

Educational Programs Briefing & Discussion: Undergraduate

BACKGROUND

This briefing summarizes key information about undergraduate academic programs; describes the programs and initiatives aimed at delivering a high quality, globally relevant, and affordable education at the undergraduate level; and discusses education-related opportunities and threats facing the university, especially in response to the global pandemic.

NEW ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Since fall 2016, OSU has enrolled students in thirteen new bachelor's programs, with two more programs starting in winter and spring 2021 terms. See Table 1 for fall 2020 enrollment information. Some program enrollments, like those in Geography & Geospatial Science and Music, reflect the interest OSU anticipated from existing students in related programs. Other program enrollments, such as those in Business Analytics, reflect new student interest. The Marine Studies program enrolled its first students in winter 2020, and increasing enrollment is expected in that program over the next several years. Five of the fifteen new programs were launched at OSU-Cascades, and the Arts, Media, & Technology and Outdoor Products degrees are off to robust starts. In general, the programs OSU has launched in the last five to six years are building solid enrollments.

Table 1. New undergraduate programs launched since fall 2015, with campus and enrollments (*unofficial enrollment in starting term).

Undergraduate Majors	Campus	Start date	Fall 2020 Enrollment
Biochemistry & Molecular Biology (BS)	Corvallis	2016 Fall	343
Geography & Geospatial Science (BS)	Corvallis/Ecampus	2017 Summer	116
Architectural Engineering (BS)	Corvallis	2018 Summer	72
Public Policy (BS)	Corvallis	2018 Summer	36
Arts, Media, & Technology (BA/BS)	Cascades	2019 Summer	34
Environmental Sciences (BS)	Cascades	2019 Fall	9
Elementary Education (BS)	Cascades	2019 Winter	14
Biological Data Sciences (BS)	Corvallis	2020 Summer	3
Creative Writing (BA)	Corvallis	2020 Summer	10
Music (BM)	Corvallis	2020 Summer	133
Engineering Science (BS)	Cascades	2020 Fall	8
Outdoor Products (BS)	Cascades	2020 Fall	18
Business Analytics (BS)	Corvallis/Ecampus	2020 Winter	58*
Marine Studies (BA/BS)	Corvallis	2021 Winter	87*
Supply Chain & Logistics Mgmt (BS)	Corvallis	2021 Spring	N/A

PROGRESS ON STRATEGIC METRICS

In 2020, the university attained its highest ever official six-year graduation rate: 69.3%. This metric has been slowly increasing over the last several years, and the increase is reflected across students of color, Pell-eligible students, and first-generation students. OSU's Pell-eligible and first-generation students do lag behind other students in the six-year graduation rate, though the gaps are narrowing somewhat. The overall first-year retention rate dipped slightly to 84.2% from a high of 85.2% for the previous year's cohort, but the retention rate among students of color and Pell-eligible students increased over the previous year. (Table 2)

Table 2. First-year retention (fall 2018 to fall 2019) and six-year graduation rates (for entering fall 2014 cohort). *Students of color include African-Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders. Numbers in **bold** signify an increase from the previous year.

Student Population	First-year Retention	Six-year Graduation
Overall	84.2%	69.3%
Students of Color*	82.5%	67.8%
Non-SOC	85.0%	69.9%
Pell	79.9%	61.9%
Non-Pell	85.4%	73.3%
First-generation	79.2%	64.4%
Non-First-gen	85.7%	71.3%

Over the 2019-20 academic year, the Undergraduate Student Success Initiative (USSI) Steering Committee considered what new initiatives might advance student success faster. In fall 2020, the provost approved support for two of the committee's recommendations: recurring funding for completion and retention scholarships at \$200,000 annually until such time as donor funds become available; and the hiring of a Director of the Baccalaureate Core. A third proposal to hire a Director of SNAP benefits was declined. Instead, it was determined the divisions of Student Affairs and Extension and Engagement have the capacity to provide information to students regarding SNAP benefits.

The USSI organized the third annual Student Success Summit, held in March 2020, just a few weeks before the university transitioned to remote activities.

The USSI Steering Committee will continue to monitor retention and completion rates and offer support and guidance to the Baccalaureate Core reform efforts (more below). A two-hour virtual Student Success event is being planned to take place in May, giving faculty and staff an opportunity to reflect on the last year, share innovations in student success from inside and outside the classroom, and look forward to resuming more on-campus activity in fall 2021.

ON-GOING INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS

Academic Program Planning

Our desire to move towards a process of strategic planning for development of new academic programs has been delayed by the move to the remote delivery of the vast majority of our academic offerings during the 2020-21 academic year. Since April 2020, representatives from the Office of Undergraduate Education (OUE) have met almost weekly with the academic associate deans from colleges and OSU-Cascades to direct, coordinate, and implement delivery of remote instruction. The experiences of the last year are leading us to consider delivery modality more intentionally in academic program planning going forward, and we have now added the “remote synchronous” category to our standing set of modalities.

In addition, the provost has convened a small group of senior leaders to consider and recommend potential adjustments to SP4.0 actions and specific projects in light of OSU’s experiences through the pandemic, the killing of George Floyd, the Oregon wildfires, and the divisiveness of the 2020 national election. Among the possible adjustments are several that relate to curricula and associated academic program planning.

Baccalaureate Core Reform

The Faculty Senate’s Baccalaureate Core 2.0 Committee, charged with recommending reforms of the Baccalaureate Core (BC), has developed three potential new BC models and begun a series of campus conversations about them. In early March, OUE launched an internal search for a BC Director, as recommended by the USSI Steering Committee. A revised BC coupled with appropriate staffing capacity to oversee its implementation and maintenance are key components of a successful reform. A simplified BC, with a lower total number of credits and one that is structured in alignment with the state’s Core Transfer Map — a statewide transfer tool for general education credits — is anticipated to help ease students’ transfer to OSU from any of the other public institutions of higher education in Oregon.

Center for Teaching and Learning

This past year, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) launched a new program to provide support and resources for teaching faculty adjusting to remote delivery of instruction. With CTL as coordinator, one to three faculty peers from each college engaged as a professional learning community to promote best practices for remote instruction and share resources with their

faculty colleagues. Early reports suggest the program has been very successful at reaching a larger group of teaching faculty than have historically taken advantage of CTL programming.

High Impact Learning

Even in the largely remote environment, OSU has 226 students participating in research experiences through the Undergraduate Research, Scholarships, and the Arts (URSA) program. This is down only slightly from the high of 247 students who participated last year. The university's URSA efforts were recently highlighted in the publication *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*: "Research Experiences for All Undergraduate Students? Building a More Equitable and Inclusive Office of Undergraduate Research at a Land-Grant Institution" (2020, Pierszalowski, Smith, & Lopez-Cevallos). In addition to the URSA program, another 60 students are engaged in first-year research experiences through the STEM Leaders program, which serves students typically underrepresented in STEM fields, including women, students of color, and first-generation students.

Students' capacity to participate in OSU study abroad has been severely impacted by the pandemic. In spring 2020, OSU worked to bring students who were abroad back to the US. Summer and fall of 2020 programs were suspended, as were winter and spring 2021 programs. We are hopeful that we can begin supporting students wishing to study abroad in fall 2021, as public health conditions are expected to improve in the US and around the world. We have developed virtual international internships and staff are pursuing other remote international study opportunities for students.

University Accreditation and Program Assessment

In fall 2020, OSU submitted an Ad Hoc Report and a Progress Report to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). These reports provided updates regarding progress towards the three recommendations from OSU's June 2019 accreditation site visit. The NWCCU has determined that OSU fulfilled the expectations related to Recommendation 1 calling for alignment of our "mission fulfillment yardsticks" with other metrics and actions related to SP4.0. NWCCU also noted that the university is making progress towards the remaining two recommendations, and we will report on these again in spring of 2022.

Both Recommendations 2 and 3 related to student learning outcomes and assessment, and we have substantive efforts underway to work towards fulfilling our objective of authentic, sustained full-cycle assessment. The result will be that all programs will assess student learning outcomes and, as a result of those assessments, consider programmatic improvements to foster greater student learning and success.

NEW INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS

New activities in support of undergraduates and undergraduate academic programs continue to be driven by specific SP4.0 actions:

1. Provide distinctive curricula and support innovative pedagogy to advance OSU's mission and vision;
2. Increase experiential learning opportunities and ensure access;
3. Expand pathways to an OSU credential;

4. Increase the retention and graduation rates for all students;
5. Integrate inclusive excellence principles and practices into all aspects of the university.

In the last year, our strategic efforts have also been informed by current national and global events.

Accelerated Credit Program Development

Oregon State University and the University of Oregon (UO) remain the only two public higher education institutions in the state not offering high school-based accelerated credit programs, though UO has a program in development. OUE undertook an analysis of existing programs across Oregon and has compiled recommendations on whether OSU should initiate such a program.

OSU's priority is to provide equitable access to higher education, especially for students from historically underserved populations, rural areas, and low-income families. In considering how to support these students, the university must acknowledge that financial obstacles may be too large for some students to overcome on their own. In an effort to reach more rural communities, online education (sponsored dual credit and/or direct enrollment) may be the only viable option, and yet those opportunities may come with higher out-of-pocket costs for students. A team has been evaluating ways to leverage existing OSU efforts, including the programs that have established partnerships with school districts and communities across the state, such as 4-H, Juntos, and PreCollege Programs (e.g., AVID).

Advising at OSU

OUE is working closely with the Council of Head Advisors (CHA) to look at advising leadership, reporting lines, career paths, and professional development needs across the university. Consistent with practices at most major research universities, all advising except for students in the Exploratory Studies Program, takes place in the colleges. However, coordination among advisors is still important. All advisors are now using a Microsoft tool called Bookings to schedule meetings. This has been well-received by students as it creates a degree of uniformity across their advising experiences. Work is underway to align advisor position duties across the colleges to further goals around consistency in the student experience.

Racism and Antiracism Curriculum Task Force

In the fall of 2020, Provost Ed Feser and then Faculty Senate President Dwaine Plaza charged a Task Force to examine curricular and co-curricular offerings related to racism and antiracism. The formation of the Task Force came in response to student demands following the killing of George Floyd and national attention on issues of systemic racism. The primary focus of the Task Force task force is to consider whether all students should be required to take a first-year course on antiracism; whether modifications are needed to the Difference, Power, and Discrimination program, a requirement in the Baccalaureate Core; and what professional development is needed for faculty to adequately teach about racism and antiracism.

Transfer Student Success

In June 2020, the Statewide Provosts Council charged a workgroup of academic affairs staff and university registrars from the seven public universities to study data on transfer student

success in Oregon and to make recommendations regarding actions that would substantively improve transfer success. An analysis of OSU students who graduated in 2019 found that those who attend *only one* community college before transferring to OSU do not accumulate any more total credits when compared to students who spend their entire post-secondary career at OSU. This suggests that “excess credits”—credits earned over the 180 total required for a baccalaureate degree—are not a particular issue for transfer students who connect to OSU through a single community college. Students who attend more than one community college before transferring to OSU may accumulate more excess credits, possibly because of stopping and starting or changes in intended degree paths. Staff will analyze another year’s worth of data to verify.

The workgroup proposed adopting a common learning outcomes and course numbering system for all public institutions of higher education in Oregon, as well as an effort to align general education categories across all institutions. These two efforts were judged by the workgroup as likely to have the greatest possible impact on transfer student success across the state.

A HECC report released indicates that, on average across the seven public universities, transfer students graduate with six excess credits. While this is not a large number, all agree there is a need to minimize excess credits or duplicated credits among transfer students. A larger concern with respect to transfer student success is the lower rate at which transfer students graduate. At OSU in 2019, the four-year graduation rate for junior transfers was 59.7%, well below the six-year graduation rate of 69.3% for students who do not transfer. We will dig deeper into these data, as several factors differentiating transfer students from non-transfer students may be at play here.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Pushing classroom climate and inclusivity training out to instructional faculty via the Peer Support and Resources program supported by the CTL.
2. Delivery of all courses and programs according to “best” modalities for all material. This is also true for academic support programs and activities (e.g., advising, office hours).
3. Strategic engagement of faculty around program development responsive to the multiple crises we experienced in 2020 and early 2021.
4. Revisioning and expansion of “global learning” for undergraduate students using remote program and virtual internships.

THREATS

1. Depending on how the Common Course Numbering bill currently under amendment in the Oregon legislature is finalized, it may make reaching agreement on common learning outcomes and numbers more difficult. OSU and all state public universities are working with the bill’s sponsors to try to ensure it is best placed to support achievement of this goal. Also, the bill will create some amount of significant faculty service work for several academic units and administrative work that will have important resource implications.

2. Continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic: faculty, student mental health and wellbeing; study abroad.
3. Potential resistance to Baccalaureate Core reform among some faculty.