



# CREDIT-BY-EXAM ACCEPTANCE POLICIES

*Advanced study of Washington State's Public Colleges and Universities*

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## BACKGROUND

In the 21st century, a high school diploma is not enough to ensure a living wage. A college degree is now a determinant of whether a family enters, or remains in, the middle class (Carnevale, 2007). For much of the past decade, Washington State has worked toward getting more students not just to graduation, but to and through a postsecondary degree or credential. And Washington State's postsecondary completion rates are noteworthy: In 2010, 41 percent of the students at its baccalaureate institutions graduated in four years, compared to the national average of 31 percent (Chronicle of Higher Education, n.d.).

Washington Student Achievement Council's 10-Year Roadmap sets a goal for 2023 of having 70 percent of Washington adults (ages 25-44) receive a postsecondary credential. At the same time, dramatic cuts in state funding for higher education, particularly since 2008, have shifted more of the cost of higher education onto students and families, making the state's goals for increasing college graduation rates more difficult to meet. One strategy to improve college readiness and reduce the cost of college to students and the state is the expansion of dual enrollment or dual credit programs that enable students to earn college credit<sup>1</sup> while they are still in high school.

### Dual Enrollment and Dual Credit Options

### Dual Enrollment and Dual Credit Options

Six programs in Washington State provide opportunities for high school students to earn high school credit and college credit simultaneously, as summarized in Table 1 (next page). They can be sorted into two broad categories: credit-by-examination and credit-by-course. While recent state legislation promotes expansion of dual credit options as well as improvement in access to these types of programs for all high school students, each school district may choose the options that best meet its organization and its students' needs (OSPI Organization and Financing of Washington Public Schools).

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *dual enrollment* and *dual credit* are often used interchangeably to describe any program in which high school students are offered college-level coursework, with the opportunity to earn credit at both high school and college levels at the same time. With some programs, like Running Start and College in the High School, students are concurrently enrolled in their high school and a two- or four-year postsecondary institution. In other programs, like Advanced Placement (AP), college-level courses are offered by the high school and the student takes an exam to demonstrate college level achievement or competency.

Table 1. Dual enrollment options in Washington State

<b>CREDIT-BY-EXAM</b>	Advanced Placement (AP)	34 college-level courses in a variety of subjects offered by high schools. Mastery is assessed through end-of-course exams. Most colleges and universities award credit for AP exams at specified scores.
	International Baccalaureate (IB)	An internationally recognized program of coursework. Students may take individual courses or earn an IB diploma. Many colleges and universities award college credit for IB exams at specified scores and may award up to a year of credit for completion of the diploma.
	Cambridge International (CI)	An internationally based program of coursework, with annual exams to assess proficiency. Some US colleges and universities award credit for CI exams at specified scores.
<b>CREDIT-BY-COURSE</b>	College in the High School (CHS)	High school-college partnership. College-qualified instructors teach in high school using college curriculum. Students earn both high school and college credit for successful completion.
	Running Start	High school students enroll directly in college, two-year or four-year, replacing some or all high school courses with college courses. Students earn both high school and college credit.
	Tech Prep	High school-college articulation agreement based on near equivalency (80% or more match) of professional-technical coursework. Students enroll in high school, and the articulating college awards college credit upon successful course completion.

## Recent Legislation

In 2011, the Washington State Legislature passed and Governor Gregoire signed E2SHB 1808, The Launch Year Act, designed to increase opportunities for students to earn one year of postsecondary credit before graduating from high school.

The Launch Year Act requires public high schools to provide specific programs for two groups:

- Students planning to attend a baccalaureate institution, and

- Students planning to pursue other career opportunities such as apprenticeship or other professional technical education programs ([RCW 28A.230.130](#)).

The Launch Year Act requires public postsecondary institutions to do the following:

- Collaboratively develop and publish a master list of qualifying courses and qualifying examination scores;
- “To the maximum extent possible,” agree on qualifying scores and demonstrated competencies for these programs;
- “Recognize the equivalencies of at least one year of course credit and maximize the application of the credits toward lower division general education requirements that can be earned” through these programs; and
- Clearly include this information on admissions materials and the institution's web site ([RCW 28B.10.050](#)).

In 2013, Governor Inslee signed 2SHB 1642 into law, encouraging each school district to create an Academic Acceleration Policy. This act provided one-time grants and ongoing incentives to high schools to expand availability of the five dual-credit programs offered in high schools: AP, IB, Cambridge, College in the High School, and Tech Prep ([RCW 28A.320.196](#)). The legislation directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to collect data on student enrollment in dual credit courses and publish it on the Washington state report card website ([RCW 28A.300.560](#)), and to annually report to the Legislature demographics of students earning dual credit in high schools that receive incentive funding.

During the 2014 legislative session, HB 2285, aimed at furthering the dual credit acceleration agenda, was introduced. This bill would have directed the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to review two- and four-year institutions' policies for awarding credit for exam-based dual credit programs and to make recommendations to the Legislature on how to improve these practices. While the bill was passed unanimously by the House, it did not make it out of committee in the Senate.

## Project Purpose

This analysis assesses current college dual credit-by-exam policies at postsecondary institutions throughout the state. As described in proposed HB 2285, our review identifies:

- The major policy differences in awarding credit for AP, IB, and Cambridge coursework among institutions of higher education,
- The major policy differences in awarding credit for AP, IB, and Cambridge coursework within each institution, and
- Effective practices for awarding credit for AP, IB, and Cambridge.

We examine these issues from the perspective of what the implementation of these policies means for high school students and their parents, as they consider their postsecondary options.

## WASHINGTON STATE STUDENTS

Students can graduate from college sooner, spend less money and accrue less debt, if they receive credit for college-level coursework in high school—especially credit toward specific general education requirements or major courses. If students could find and understand information about how colleges and universities award credit for their exam scores, that information would likely influence their decision about where to go to college, especially in areas with several postsecondary institutions—some of which have more liberal policies for awarding credit.

Pertinent questions for prospective college students and their families are:

- How much of the college-level credits students earn in these programs are accepted by colleges and universities?
- What types of credit are students awarded for these courses, e.g. required general education credits or elective credits?
- When students are considering applying to an institution, how easy it for them to get an accurate idea of how their own credits will be accepted by that institution?

Graduating more students who are not only college-ready but have demonstrated their capacity to do college-level work moves the state toward its goals for high school graduates. Providing mechanisms for them to graduate from college faster moves the state toward the 2023 goal of 70% of the population having a postsecondary degree or credential, and it does so while minimizing the costs to the state as well as students and their families.

## WASHINGTON STATE HIGH SCHOOLS: CREDIT-BY-EXAM PROGRAMS

As described in Table 2, three dual credit programs allow students to earn college credit through standardized exams: Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Cambridge International (CI). Each program consists of a rigorous course of study prescribed by the authorizing organization; classes are designed to be equivalent to first-year college courses. Classes are generally followed

by a standardized examination to assess students' proficiency<sup>2</sup>, which may qualify them for college credit or advanced placement at higher levels in college. Accelerated learning diploma opportunities include the Advanced Placement International Diploma (APID), International Baccalaureate Diploma (IBD), and the Cambridge Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) if students demonstrate proficiency on a sufficient number of courses and meet other requirements.

Table 2. Comparison of dual credit-by-exam programs in Washington State

Program	Schools	Fees	Source
Advanced Placement	312 public	No annual fee to school. Required Professional Development. Student fees: \$89 per exam.	<a href="http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/ap-program-guide.pdf">http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/ap-program-guide.pdf</a>
International Baccalaureate	16 public 5 private	School fees: \$10,820 per year for the Diploma Program. Student fees: \$160 registration plus \$110 for each exam.	<a href="http://www.ibo.org/become/fees/">http://www.ibo.org/become/fees/</a>
Cambridge International	2 public	Annual school participation fee not disclosed. Student fees: Registration fee of \$26 plus \$67 for each exam <sup>3</sup> .	<a href="http://www.cie.org.uk/cambridge-for/principals-and-heads/join-cambridge/our-fees/">http://www.cie.org.uk/cambridge-for/principals-and-heads/join-cambridge/our-fees/</a>

Note: The federal government provides grants to the states to subsidize test fees for low-income students. While the program is known as the "AP Test Fee Program," it can also be used to pay IB and Cambridge exam fees (U.S. Dept. of Education, n.d.). Test Fees noted are for the 2014-2015 academic year.

## Advanced Placement

AP began in 1952 as a project of the Ford Foundation's Fund for the Advancement of Education, to prepare prep school students to begin college with higher level studies (advanced placement) in Ivy League colleges (College Board, 2003). Students who scored a passing grade on standardized exams could bypass introductory courses and enroll directly in upper level courses, allowing them to attain a higher level in their four

<sup>2</sup> One exception is AP Studio Art, where assessment is by portfolio rather than examination.

<sup>3</sup> From OSPI.

years of college. The Foundation developed rigorous college-level courses to be taught in high schools, and the pilot program took off. In 1954, The College Board assumed administration of the program.

AP programs spread to high schools around the country, enrolling ever more high school students in advanced courses, testing more students to demonstrate their proficiency, and attesting to college equivalences based on students' assessed mastery. The program continues to provide rigorous high school courses, and to administer end-of course examinations each May. High school and college faculty participate in curriculum development, test preparation, and scoring. AP scores range from 1 to 5.

In spring of 2013, students from 312 schools in Washington State (about 75% of the state's high schools) participated in the AP testing, with 40,616 students taking 64,851 AP exams. Access to AP courses is distributed unevenly around the state, as are other educational resources (Office of the Superintendent of Instruction, n.d.).

## International Baccalaureate

The IB program was developed in the 1960s at the International School of Geneva in Switzerland. While IB has a K-12 curriculum, most programs in the U.S. focus on the college preparatory curriculum designed for the last two years of high school. IB focuses on broadening students' understanding of the larger world to develop critical thinkers with a world view who can examine issues from a variety of perspectives.

For the high school program, there are two levels of courses: First-year or Standard Level (SL) courses do not typically earn college credit in Washington. Second-year or Higher Level (HL) are considered college-equivalent coursework in Washington. At either level, students demonstrate proficiency in individual courses based on both an external IB assessment (exam) and the teacher's assessment of student work. IB scores range from 1 to 7.

Students may take one or more individual IB courses or may elect to take the entire program of courses to earn an International Baccalaureate Diploma. To earn the IB diploma, students must take six IB courses over two years, at least half at the Higher Level, selected from specific disciplines. In addition, students must complete community service hours, as well as an interdisciplinary course—Theory of Knowledge—and an extended essay. Students must earn at least 24 points (6 courses at 4 points each, for example) to be awarded the IB diploma. Some colleges award one year's college credit for the IB diploma. Others award credit, often up to one year, for selected IB courses. The IB Diploma is recognized throughout the world.

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) reports that 21 Washington high schools, including 5 private high schools, participate in the International Baccalaureate

Diploma Program. Most schools offering the program in Washington are in the greater Puget Sound region.

## Cambridge International

The Cambridge International (CI) program has many subprograms beginning in elementary school. At the senior high school level (typically ages 16-19), the Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) program is offered. Cambridge credit awards are based entirely on examinations; in that sense, the program is more like AP than IB. A diploma is awarded to students who successfully complete a specific set of exams within a 13-month period. Cambridge exams are offered at two levels, A-Level and AS-Level. Each A-Level is worth two AS-Levels, both for the AICE credential and for most colleges awarding credit for AS-Levels. Two Washington schools, Juanita High School in the Lake Washington School District, and Federal Way High School in the Federal Way School District, offer the Cambridge program.

## WASHINGTON POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS: CREDIT AWARDS FOR CREDIT-BY-EXAM PROGRAMS

Both two-year and four-year colleges vary widely in how they award credit for these three programs.

There are significant differences in two key areas:

1. Whether each institution recognizes each of the three credit-by-exam programs and how explicit their published policies are for each program are.
2. For those institutions that recognize these programs, how college credits are awarded for each of these programs.

## Methods

This project approaches the question of what a particular institution's policies are the way it is assumed a typical student would answer this question—by reviewing the institution's admissions policies, most commonly accessed from the institution's webpage.

The report answers the question: What are the published, or publicly available, policies of each public institution in Washington? <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> It's possible that some institutions may consider accepting credit for programs when students make a request, however, this report is limited to information that institutions make publicly available.

### *Limitations*

Data about institutions' policies was collected in April and May 2014. Since both the two-year and four-year institutions' policies and websites are always evolving, readers should check each institution's website for up-to-date information about its policies.

Do Washington's public colleges and universities have credit acceptance policies for these programs?

### *Advanced Placement*

Most public colleges and universities throughout Washington State recognize AP and post a policy regarding credit awards for AP somewhere on their admissions website, including a list of AP courses and required scores that are accepted for credit. The exception is The Evergreen State College (Evergreen). Since Evergreen has no course requirements for undergraduates, each student's dual-credit exams are individually evaluated for credit.

### *International Baccalaureate*

All of the public baccalaureates also recognize IB, though the specificity of their posted policies varies. In most cases, a list of courses for which credit is awarded as well as the credit and course equivalencies for each IB class, is available on the web. All four-year public baccalaureates have a posted policy for IB, and twenty-five of the state's thirty-four community and technical colleges currently have posted policies for the acceptance of IB credits.

### *Cambridge International*

Only two public baccalaureate institutions—University of Washington (UW) and Western Washington University (WWU)—have posted policies for Cambridge International. There are no two-year colleges that have posted policies for Cambridge. This is most likely due to Cambridge's newcomer status in Washington. At both UW and WWU, Cambridge transcripts are evaluated on a case-by-case basis and individual credit and course equivalency determinations are made.

Table 3 summarizes credit-by-exam policies for the public baccalaureates. The two-year institutions that do not currently have posted policies for IB are: Bellingham Technical College, Big Bend Community College, Centralia Community College, Peninsula College, Pierce College, Wenatchee Valley Community College, and Renton Technical College.

Table 3. Is a policy for awarding credit displayed on the Admissions website?

Institution	AP	IB	Cambridge
Central Washington University	Yes	Yes	
Eastern Washington University	Yes	Yes	
The Evergreen State College	Yes	Yes	
University of Washington	Yes	Yes	Yes
Washington State University	Yes	Yes	
Western Washington University	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community and Technical Colleges	Yes	Most (26 of 34)	

### Once accepted, how is college-level credit awarded?

Currently, credit awards for high school credit-by-exam programs vary widely between Washington state institutions, particularly at the public baccalaureates.

To support their planning students need to know:

- Which courses will result in college credit??
- What types of credit will be awarded? (i.e., credit for specific college courses and/or credit toward general education requirements, or elective credit)
- How much credit will be awarded?

This report addresses each of these questions by program, for four-year and two-year institutions.

### Which courses will result in college credit?

#### *Advanced Placement*

Washington State Community and Technical Colleges (CTCs) are required to award credit for AP scores of 3 or higher (State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Policy Manual 4.30.10). The baccalaureates have more latitude in awarding credit for AP scores. Of the 34 AP courses offered, the number of exams accepted for credit ranges from 22 at UW to 29 at WSU. All of the public baccalaureates award some credit for a minimum score of 3; CWU and UW require higher scores to receive credit for

specific courses that meet general education requirements or courses in the major<sup>5</sup>. Students have the potential to earn up to a year's worth of transferrable credit for AP exams.

### *International Baccalaureate*

There is much greater variation in acceptance of IB credit. Schools that accept IB credit accept it primarily for second-year, or Higher Level (HL), IB exams—math, English, chemistry, and foreign languages—with exceptions for some IB courses that are only offered at the one-year, or Standard Level (SL), such as psychology. While IB offers almost as many courses as AP, a large number of them are foreign languages (10) and history (4); a student will only take one of each of these courses. At public baccalaureates, the number of IB courses accepted for credit range from 8 at Eastern Washington University to 25 at Washington State University.

While a few community and technical colleges that recognize IB exams give credit for scores of 4; most award credit only for scores of 5, 6, and 7. Minimum IB scores for credit at baccalaureate institutions are shown in Table 4.

The fact that a student is unlikely to take more than seven IB courses, coupled with the reduced number of exams accepted for credit at some of Washington's public institutions, makes it more difficult for a student to earn a year of credit for IB exams. However, many colleges award one year's credit and sophomore standing for the IB Diploma, which includes SL and HL exams, a cross-disciplinary course, an essay, and a minimum of 150 hours of community service, artistic, and physical activities.

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<sup>5</sup> CWU exceptions: Psychology and Physics: Elec and Mag (4), Government and Politics, and Comparative Government (5); UW exceptions: English, Art History, Economics, Biology, Computer Science A, and Physics (4).

Table 4. Minimum IB scores required for credit

Institution	Score	Exceptions
Central Washington University	3	
Eastern Washington University	5	
The Evergreen State College	4	
University of Washington	5	
Washington State University	4	Info Tech in a Global Society (5)
Western Washington University	4	
Community and Technical Colleges	4 or 5	

What types of credit will be awarded and how much credit will be awarded for each exam?

The gold standard in credit acceptance is equivalencies for General Education Requirements (GER) or General University Requirements (GUR) for pre-major breadth. All of the state's postsecondary institutions except Evergreen maintain a list of courses meeting these requirements. For two-year colleges, general degree requirements are described in the Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA). A DTA Associate Degree requires 60 credits in general education (communication, quantitative skills, and a distribution in humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences), leaving room for up to 30 elective credits (Washington Council for High School-College Relations Intercollege Relations Commission, 2004, pp. 7-8). As shown in Table 7, below, institutions differ widely in their general education requirements as well as in whether IB courses are accepted as equivalencies. Evergreen and CWU are not included.

For both AP and IB, up to a year of credit (15 quarter credits) in world languages may be awarded depending on the score earned.<sup>6</sup> However, the DTA allows only 5 credits of 100-level languages in humanities distribution, with any remaining 100-level language credits being applied to general electives. Several colleges award credit for language exams at the 200-level. Therefore 10 credits can be applied to humanities distribution and the remaining 5 credits apply to general electives. Regardless of how the credit is treated

<sup>6</sup> AP scores of 3, 4, and 5 are awarded 5, 10, and 15 credits respectively; IB scores of 5, 6, and 7 are awarded 5, 10, and 15 credits respectively.

to meet the humanities requirement, 15 credits in language may meet the world language graduation requirement at baccalaureate institutions.

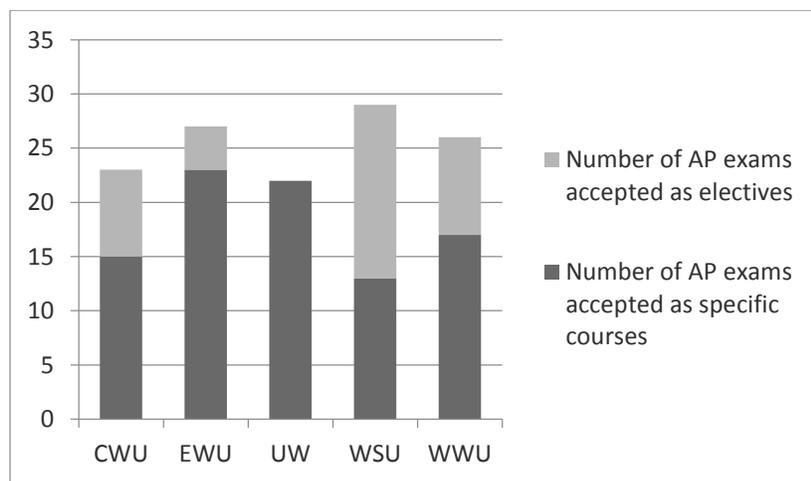
At the community college level, credit for natural sciences varies widely, mostly depending on credits awarded for equivalent courses at the college. Some colleges award Lab Science credit; many do not. In future years, some natural science courses may be standardized at a lower credit value in response to the Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN to BSN) DTA (State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2014).

### Advanced Placement

The variations in the types of credit different institutions offer are dramatic. The four-year institutions range from UW—which offers course equivalencies for all AP exams it accepts—to WSU, which offers course equivalencies for only 45 percent of the AP exams it accepts. Chart 1 shows the number of AP exams each institution accepts for college credit. These numbers are divided into exams that are awarded credit for specific college-level courses and those that are awarded elective credit.

UW awards specific course credit for all of the exams it accepts; other institutions award elective credit for some exams, ranging from 15% at Eastern Washington University (EWU) to 55% at WSU. For this tally, language was counted only once, though each institution recognizes multiple language exams.

Chart 1. Types of credit awarded by public baccalaureate institutions for AP exams



Since Evergreen does not have general education course requirements and does not offer a standardized course list, it does not require a crosswalk between exams and

courses, as other institutions do. Evergreen's policy is to award credit on an individual basis based on a review by the registrar and department chair.

State Board for Community and Technical College (SBCTC) policy requires the state's two-year institutions to award, at minimum, unrestricted elective credit for AP scores of 3 or higher (State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Policy Manual 4.30.10). However, many two-year colleges give general education credit. The variations are significant. At one end of the range, Bellevue College awards general education credit for 32 of the 34 AP exams<sup>7</sup>; elective credit is awarded only for the courses not offered at the college. At the other end of the spectrum, Bellingham Technical College awards elective credit only, for all AP exams.

In practice, few colleges award general education credits for exams with a score of 3 and, in many cases, even scores of 4 and 5 receive general elective credit. Table 5 (next page) shows how AP can be used to meet general education requirements at the public universities.

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<sup>7</sup> For most courses, a score of 4 or 5 is required for general education; students are awarded elective credit for exam scores of 3.

Table 5. General education course requirements that can be met with AP

	CWU		EWU		UW		WSU		WWU	
	(courses)		(courses)		(credits)		(courses)		(courses)	
	Req'd	A P	Req'd	AP	Req'd	AP	Req'd	AP	Req'd	AP
Comm/Writing	2				7-10		2	2	2	
English		1	1		5	5				
Quantitative & Symbolic Reasoning	1-2	-	1	1	4-5	15	1	2	1-2	3
Computer Lit.			1	-	Not required		Not required		-	-
Reasoning		-	-	-	Not required		Not required		-	-
Languages	3	3	3	3	15	15	Not required		-	-
Humanities / Arts	2-3	1	2-3	2	20	15	2	5	3 (12 cr)	6
Social Sciences	2-3	1	2-3	3	20	12	1		3 (12 cr)	5
Natural Science	2-3	1	2-3	2	20	28	1		3	6
Other	2*	-	-	-	-	-	2*	2	2*	-

This table shows the number of required general education courses or credits and the number of these requirements it is possible to fulfill with AP equivalencies. Numbers are for required courses, unless credits is indicated. General education requirements for UW vary by school or college; the requirements in this chart are for the College of Arts and Sciences.

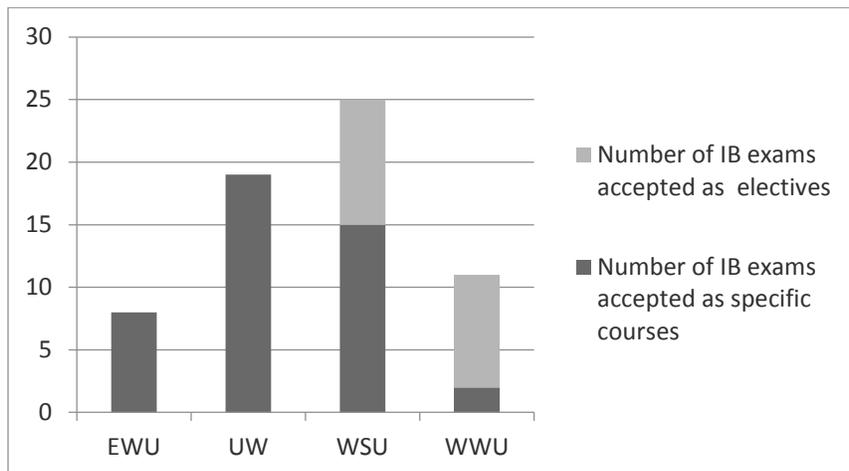
\* Additional requirements: CWU requires 1 course each in Cultural and Gender Diversity and International Studies; WSU requires 1 First-Year Experience course and 1 Diversity course; WWU requires 2 courses in Comparative/Gender/Multicultural Studies.

[»Click here for more information about how Washington's public institutions award credit for AP exams.](#)

### International Baccalaureate

The differences in credit awards between institutions are even more dramatic for IB. UW, again, offers course credit for 100% of the IB exams it accepts; WWU, on the other hand, offers course credit for just two of the eleven IB exams it accepts (see Chart 2).

Chart 2. Types of credit awarded by public baccalaureate institutions for IB exams



UW and EWU award credit for specific courses for all the exams they accept. Other institutions award elective credit for between 40% (WSU) and more than 80% (WWU) of the exams they accept. Again, foreign language was only counted once.

Besides the numbers of subject-area exams accepted and the spread between course credit and elective credit, two additional differences are worth noting:

- At EWU, no credit is offered for IB Calculus.
- At EWU and WWU, no credit is offered for IB foreign language exams.

Table 7. General education course requirements that can be satisfied with IB exams

	EWU		UW		WSU		WWU	
	(courses)		(credits)		(courses)		(courses)	
	Req'd	Met	Req'd	Met	Req'd	Met	Req'd	Met
<b>English</b>	1		7-10	6	2	1	3	1
<b>Math</b>	1	1		5	1		1-2	1
<b>Computing</b>	1		<i>Not required</i>		<i>Not required</i>			
<b>Reasoning</b>			<i>Not required</i>		<i>Not required</i>			
<b>Languages</b>	3		15	15	<i>Not required</i>			
<b>Humanities / Arts</b>	2-3		20	15	2	4	3	4
<b>Social Sciences</b>	2-3		20	20	1	2	3	3
<b>Natural Science</b>	2-3		20	5	1	3	3	4
<b>Diversity</b>					1	1	2	3

[» Click here for more information about how Washington's public institutions award credit for IB exams.](#)

#### *Actions toward consistency between institutions*

As reported by Joyce Hammer at the WSAC Dual Credit Workgroup meeting (May 12, 2014), the Community and Technical Colleges (CTC) plan to have a policy for system-wide AP equivalencies in place by fall of 2015. Once this policy is implemented or in place, they will develop a similar policy for IB. SBCTC and the CTC institutions are also working on a common data reporting system for "non-traditional learning"; AP, IB, and Cambridge will be included in this system (SBCTC, n.d.). As reported by Jane Sherman at the Dual Credit Workgroup meeting (May 12, 2014), the Council of Presidents office is encouraging the public baccalaureates to look at their subject scores and equivalencies again, especially for scores that appear to be outliers compared to other

campuses. The public baccalaureate institutions are currently reviewing their AP policies with faculty, with plans to systematically update their websites.

## FINDINGS

This review of policies at Washington public institutions identifies a broad range of differences in the programs institutions recognize, how they evaluate credit, the list of courses they award credit for, the minimum scores required for credit, the amount of credit awarded for different scores, and how they communicate this information to prospective students and their families. Individual institutions and the state as a whole are doing a good job working toward the requirements of the Launch Year Act, but it is clear there is still some work to be done. The fundamental goal—to make it easy for students and their families to understand how colleges will evaluate their high school work, and what kinds—and how much—credit will be awarded, has not been fully achieved.

While all of the postsecondary institutions in the state system are making strides in improving their articulation of pathways and policies for students who have participated in these programs, this research highlights some issues that still remain. On closer inspection, some of the differences may be completely appropriate, while others may need to be addressed to better serve the state's students.

### 1. There are dramatic differences in how Washington's postsecondary institutions recognize credit-by-exam programs.

The Launch Year Act directs each institution to “develop a master list of postsecondary courses that can be fulfilled by taking the advanced placement, international baccalaureate, or other recognized college-level proficiency examinations [*italics added*] and meeting the qualifying examination score...”

Currently, there are differences at the most basic level—whether or not each state institution has a publicly available policy for each of the three credit-by-exam programs offered at public high schools within the state (AP, IB, and Cambridge International).

While AP is universally recognized by Washington State's public two-year and public four-year institutions, the other two advanced study programs that are offered at Washington high schools—IB and Cambridge—are not. Although all of the public four-year colleges and universities have IB policies, 9 of the state's 34 two-year colleges do not currently have IB policies. Only two public baccalaureates in Washington—UW and WWU—have posted policies for Cambridge, and none of the two-year institutions have posted policies for Cambridge International.

There are also dramatic differences in how credits are awarded for each of these three programs. While almost all of the colleges and universities have credit award tables showing equivalencies for AP, some institutions evaluate IB credits on a case-by-case basis—as do both of the institutions that recognize Cambridge International credits. In addition, where credit equivalencies are posted, most institutions accept far fewer IB exams than AP exams.

## 2. Credit-by-exam award policies are not always easy to find.

Colleges and universities categorize information about credit-by-exam programs in different ways. Some institutions group it with other high school programs, like Running Start and College in the High School. Others consider it transfer credit or prior learning experience. UW's information about Cambridge is located only on its admissions pages for international students. The good news is that on several of the four year institutions' sites, it is relatively easy to get to this information. Figure 1 shows the sequence of webpages or menus a prospective student must navigate on the CWU, EWU, and UW websites. It is four pages and the pathway, an option freshman admissions pages, is easy to follow. It is likely that this terminology—College Credit Earned in High School—is most accessible to high school students.

Figure 1. Website navigation to advanced study credit information on CWU, EWU, and UW



Many of the two-year colleges, as well as Evergreen, post information about these programs under the transfer student pathway as transfer credit or prior learning. Students who have just graduated from high school are unlikely to go to the transfer student webpages unless they find them through an institution's search function.

## 3. It can be difficult for a student to get a sense of what his or her credit will be “worth”.

When schools provide detailed information about exam scores and courses they accept, and the amount of credit for each exam, a prospective student has a good idea of how much credit he or she may be granted for coursework completed in high school. Without a list, it is difficult for a prospective student to get a sense of how much of his or her exam-based work will be awarded credit. Since credit evaluations are typically not done until after a student commits to an institution, and in some cases not

until the student has earned some credit<sup>8</sup>, the student does not have this key piece of information while she is shopping for a college or university, or—in some cases—even after she's enrolled. One of the key benefits of this coursework is it may allow students to avoid certain entry level courses and move directly into more advanced courses during their freshman year. However, if the student does not have timely information about how the courses count toward meeting college or university requirements they may lose this opportunity and enroll in courses they may not have needed to take.

#### 4. In Washington, exam-based programs are less certain to earn college credit than Running Start and College in the High School<sup>9</sup>.

Most postsecondary institutions require a minimum AP score of 3, and IB scores of 4 or 5 (depending on the institution), to award college credit. If a student completes an AP or IB course but does not take or pass the exam, he or she may benefit in college readiness, but will not receive college credit. In contrast, students participating in Running Start or College in the High School receive credit at colleges and universities when they successfully complete the course, without taking and passing an external exam.

A study by UW's College in the High School (UWHS) program revealed that, based on AP exam results, 46 percent of the 2013 class would be eligible for a credit in a first-quarter Psychology course, and 88 percent for credit in a first quarter Latin course. In addition, 25 percent of students who tested for Calculus AB, 56 percent of students tested for Calculus BC, and 40 percent of students who tested for Spanish 202, would have been eligible for credit in the second course in a sequence. Nearly all students who enrolled in UWHS were eligible for college-level credit based on course completion (Stetter, 2013).

#### 5. We do not know yet how much these programs are reducing time-to-degree.

Data should begin to be available as the state's K-12 and higher education data systems develop better linkages. To this end, analysis of dual credit completions will be added to the OSPI report card in 2015.

In other states, researchers have found evidence of several related indicators. For example, in 2007, the Community College Research Center at Columbia University

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<sup>8</sup> Grays Harbor College, requires 10 credits at Grays Harbor before evaluation will be initiated.

<sup>9</sup> Institutions outside of Washington State, however, may be more likely to grant credit for AP, IB, and Cambridge, than for Running Start or Tech Prep.

found that students in New York State and Florida who took dual enrollment courses in high school were more likely to graduate from high school, enroll in college—and start in a four-year institutions, enroll in college full-time, and stay in college for at least two years (Karp et al, 2007). And a study of Oregon's dual credit system found that dual credit students were more likely to earn a higher GPA and continue on to the second year of college than their peers who had not taken dual credit in high school; at the second-year level, these students also accumulated more credit than their peers (Oregon University System, 2010).

We do know that credit in general education is much more useful in meeting these requirements than elective credit. Specific courses are also more valuable to students, since the number of elective credits allowed for any degree is limited, and students may want to use them to explore different subjects. Additionally, even if students receive credit for all of the AP/IB/CI exams they have taken in high school, they still may not be able to earn an associate's degree any sooner, because some courses are offered only once per year and must be completed in sequence.

It should be noted that postsecondary institutions may have good reasons for requiring students to take specific courses, or for awarding elective credit to students who pass exams with lower scores. Particular institutions may not teach their introductory courses with the same topics as the corresponding AP or IB course (Klopfenstein and Thomas in Sadler et al, 2010), and departments may have other legitimate reasons for requiring students to take certain courses. The argument can also be made that just because a student successfully completes an AP exam does not mean that a year or more later they can demonstrate the level of mastery of this material needed for the courses that follow an introductory class in a major or related field.<sup>10</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The three credit-by-exam programs, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Cambridge International, contribute to the richness of opportunity in Washington's high schools. They provide high school students with opportunities for rigorous coursework and, depending on where students matriculate, can provide college credit, allowing students to finish college sooner. These benefits are unevenly available to Washington's high school students. Making the programs and information

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<sup>10</sup> Sadler and Sonnert (2010) found that students who had passed AP exams in biology, chemistry, and physics received grades of B or B+ in subsequent introductory courses in college, acceptable but not exceptional grades.

about them more universally available can help students and the state achieve their educational goals.

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