

Oregon Senate Committee on Education
Hearing on: Transfer, Articulation, and Common Course Numbering
December 7, 2020

Testimony of Sonny Ramaswamy

Chair Michael Dembrow and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to your committee on the topic of transfer, articulation, and common course numbering.

My name is Sonny Ramaswamy. I serve as the president of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities is recognized by the United States Department of Education to accredit institutions of higher education in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and British Columbia, Canada. The Commission applies evidence-informed standards and processes to support continuous improvements and promote student achievement and success. The purpose of accreditation is to ensure educational quality, stability, and sustainability via peer evaluation against standards, eligibility requirements, and policies. Accreditation provides for accountability and quality assurance, and is an indicator of institutional quality and reputation. The Commission promotes continuous improvement and student achievement and success, with a focus on closing equity gaps. Students at accredited institutions are eligible for federal and state student aid, grants, and loans, and their degrees and credentials are recognized and accepted universally.

I was asked to address the question of whether the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities will revoke institutional accreditation if a state legislature requires: 1) use of a common course numbering system; and, 2) public institutions to accept each others' coursework for credit.

The answer is, no, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities will not revoke institutional accreditation in case of the above legislative action.

As accreditors we do not make the rules and regulations; rather, it is to interpret federal and state rules and regulations and apply them in the form of standards, requirements, and policies in the context of the unique mission of each institution. We require institutions to set their goals for student success, aligned with their mission, which we expect are aligned with the goals of the oversight bodies that are in alignment with state and federal requirements. The peer evaluative system then holds institutions accountable. As noted above, our focus is on student success, which is evaluated based on achievement of measurable student learning outcomes.

Several states, [including Florida, Arizona, Nevada, and Idaho](#), have instituted common course numbering for their institutions of higher learning. There have been no issues from an accreditation standpoint. As in any situation where a new system is instituted, these efforts have not been without initial challenges; their ultimate success has come about, in part, because of buy-in and commitment made by the relevant two- and four-year institutions, fostering of collaborative relationships, allocation of financial resources for facilitation, and last, but not least, creation and deployment of oversight/arbitration/ombuds councils of representatives from institutions and relevant state regulatory bodies. Discussions with several institutions in Oregon accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities suggest there is interest in creating such a system.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.