

Creating Flexible Pathways to Degree

Launched Spring 2021

Background

As part of our strategic plan, **Evergreen intends to expand educational opportunities for working students, returning adults and other students wanting to complete an unfinished degree, get additional credentials to support their career, or explore other educational interests.** Such students seek more flexible and targeted options than those that are currently provided by our central Olympia undergraduate curricular model of daytime, fulltime 16 credit in-person coordinated studies programs. We can expand access to an Evergreen education and grow our enrollment by adding flexible pathways to a degree or micro credentials (FLEX) in curricular areas with high student interest and relevancy to regional workforce opportunities.

Evergreen has a strongly valued identity in providing full time immersive 16 credit interdisciplinary coordinated study programs that are emergent, with relevant content and innovative pedagogies. This identity is what upholds Evergreen's place in the liberal arts and will remain an important core of Evergreen as we expand with new structures to support FLEX curriculum.

Structures to Support Flexible Pathways ("FLEX")

Following the conceptual plan for New Directions, our aim is for Evergreen to have established a College of Graduate and Professional Studies (title to be confirmed) by fall 2022 which will exist alongside a college for the liberal arts and sciences based on coordinates studies programs ("Evergreen Classic"), Evergreen Tacoma, and the Native Pathway Program. Within all these colleges or schools, students will be able to find some part-time and online offerings. However, the primary area of growth for flexible pathways to a degree will be managed and administered through the new School of Professional Studies (title to be confirmed).

Goals of the Flexible Pathways project:

1. Increase the number of flexible opportunities for students to attain a degree or another credential: in the following ways:
 - o *Online and/or in a low residency format*, ensuring that synchronous and low-residency components are offered at times when working adults are available.
 - o Through part-time study by ensuring there is a sufficient depth of 2,4, and 8 credit courses and programs at the beginning and advanced levels in key curricular areas of most interest to working adults.
2. Expand the curriculum in key curricular areas where there is demonstrated student interest that align well with career opportunities in the region. Market research conducted during the Big Bets process in 2019-2020, and reaffirmed since, demonstrates that these areas include:
 - o Business/Leadership/Entrepreneurship
 - o Health/Wellness/Psychology
 - o Arts/Design/Technology
 - o Interdisciplinary Computer Science

- o Other areas for career advancement, in partnership with state, local government, industry, and workforce development programs. Teacher education programs are one possibility.
3. Establish the administrative infrastructure to support and sustain flexible pathways to degree. These structures should address:
 - o Faculty assignment and commitment to teach the online and part-time pathways to a credential or a degree at flexible times of the day.
 - o Administrative leadership and support to organize, staff, and promote flexible curriculum.
 - o Systems to demonstrate to students all the ways to reach a degree or certificate or micro-credential in FLEX modes.
 - o Allow students to indicate their intention to follow this curriculum such as by being admitted to a college/school or by some other means.
 - o To the degree possible, facilitate clear access to all parts of the UG curriculum regardless of the administrative unit or faculty who teach, that supports FLEX pathways to a degree.
 4. Recruit, enroll and track students who wish to follow FLEX pathways to degree.
 5. Establish high touch student support services that are offered online (asynchronously and synchronously) at flexible times.

Decision-making structure

Lori Blewett and David McAvity serve as co-conveners of this project, with a leadership team that also includes Larry Geri, Sue Feldman, Abir Biswas, Stephen Beck, Julia Metzger, Kathleen Eamon, Elizabeth Williamson, and Amy Betz. Each work group will apprise and, ultimately, work with a steering committee during design and development. The steering committee, facilitated by Lori and David, will ensure recommendations are presented to Evergreen’s governing bodies, including the faculty, Senior Leadership Team, and Board of Trustees, as appropriate for decisions being considered.

Charge

To achieve these goals, I am charging the following work:

A. Design and Develop a School of Professional Studies.

The School of Professional Studies should be a uniquely Evergreen school, fully embracing the values, mission, and foci of an Evergreen education. It will draw on Evergreen’s tradition of innovative curricular design and its expertise in building collaborative learning communities to create new educational opportunities for students interested in gaining knowledge and skills for professional success. Because of the unique teaching modality and the nature of the curriculum we are building to attract new students, most of the new FLEX curriculum will be in the School of Professional Studies within the new College of Graduate and Professional Studies. In particular, the School of Professional Studies will provide administrative support for all certificate programs, including those that are embedded in the regular curriculum.

NOTE: A more detailed charge for the School of Professional Studies workgroup is still under development and will be shared soon.

Phase 1: Begins Spring 2021 Leads: Lori Blewett and Larry Geri

- 1. Create a charter, with mission, vision and purpose for the School of Professional Studies** addressing areas student body, and support, curricular focus, curricular model, level of study, faculty assignment, etc..
- 2. Set up the administrative structure to support the School of Professional Studies:** This work will be stewarded by the Academic Leadership team, who will consult with the workgroup and includes:
 - a. Establish an initial budget for the launch phase.
 - b. Hire initial staff, including a program coordinator as a project position to assist with the development and planning for the School of Professional Studies.
 - c. Work with the implementation team to develop the systems, policies and process to support the design and development of new certificate programs and FLEX pathways.
- 3. Design New Certificates Programs:** Lead: Sue Feldman (Professional Certifications) and Abir Biswas (Academic Certifications)
 - a. Design a coherent set of up to 20 new degree-applicable certificates that are stackable to complete a degree and accessible for both degree and non-degree students.
 - b. Certificate programs should be thematically connected in 4 to 5 academic and professional development areas, starting with the high demand areas outlined in the goals.
 - c. The certificate programs should be available as a sequence of part-time offerings, with each full certificate program clearly indicating whether it is online, low residency, or in-person. Scheduling of in-person or synchronous online components should reflect the needs of students who enroll.
 - d. The degree applicable certificate program may be offered at the undergraduate or graduate levels and should be affiliated with one of Evergreen's accredited degrees.
 - e. Some certificate programs will be taught by faculty assigned to the School of Professional studies, or by instructors or professional experts with regional partners. Others will be taught by regular faculty who are hired primarily to another program/school (NPP, Tacoma, Grad program, "Evergreen Classic" etc.) either as an embedded component of their regular curriculum or as an additional offering associated with the School of Professional Studies.
 - f. As much as possible, credit-bearing offerings that comprise an academic certificate program or a degree completion program in the School of Professional Studies should be available to all qualified students regardless of whether they are admitted to the school of Professional Studies, NPP, Tacoma, or the Olympia Undergraduate Program. Similarly, these offerings should be visible to all students among their curricular choices in the catalog. The SPS workgroup should recommend appropriate system and policy changes needed to achieve this objective.

Phase 2 Begins Summer 2021: Lead Lori Blewett

Design New Degree Completion Programs: For some key professional development curricular areas, including those listed in the goals, certificates programs may be complemented by appropriate

sequenced courses at the intermediate and advanced levels to support completion pathways to degree for entering students with some college and no degree.

1. Initial curricular FLEX pathways for degree should include **Health/Wellness/Psychology** and **Business/Entrepreneurship/Leadership** curricular areas. The curriculum for these two areas should be developed, staffed, and promoted for Fall 2022 enrollments. These should be available for part-time study and in an online or low residency format. The development of these FLEX paths will be supported by Dean Elizabeth Williamson, and Larry Geri respectively.
2. Develop a growth plan for adding additional areas for degree completion programs in the school of professional studies with recommendations about which areas and the timeline for their addition, starting with those listed in the goals. A proposal should be submitted for review by the feasibility team by the end of winter quarter 2022.
3. Revise Evergreen's prior learning from experiences program to allow more students to earn credit for relevant work experiences.

B. EWS integration Begins Spring 2021 Lead Lori Blewett, Stephen Beck, and Kathleen Eamon

As currently configured, the EWS program serves multiple purposes. It offers a pathway to a general liberal arts degree through coordinated studies programs for schedule-bound students that can be completed part-time and it offers courses that complement the broader undergraduate curriculum. Regular faculty hired to EWS are part-time and usually teach 8 or 12 credit coordinated studies programs. Most 2 and 4 credit courses taught are by adjunct faculty. As we expand opportunities for part-time study and add online choices, more 4, 8 and 12 credit offerings will be needed, including offerings in the day. Part of the work of the FLEX workgroup is to figure out how to integrate these offerings that have traditionally been situated in the EWS program, more broadly.

EWS Courses:

1. Formally link 2 and 4 credit courses currently offered through EWS to one or more Paths they support.
2. These courses should be considered part of the Path and stewarded by CAT leaders and Path convenors.
3. Adjunct faculty who are hired to teach these courses should affiliate with the Paths/CATs their courses support.
4. Regular faculty are encouraged to consider ways to structure their teaching to increase the number of 4 and 8 credit opportunities for students who are schedule bound, such as by offering variable credit opportunities in their programs and making these visible and available at times that are accessible to working students and returning adults.

Part-time Coordinated studies Programs:

1. The workgroup should identify structures to preserve a broad general liberal arts part-time pathway to degree for schedule bound students, while also connecting this curriculum to existing Paths. One way to do this would be create a specific general education Path that provides part-time students a pathway to degree.

2. Part-time regular faculty hired to EWS are encouraged to either affiliate with one or more of the defined Paths and offer curriculum to support part-time options in the evenings and weekends to support those Paths or choose to affiliate with a general education "Path".
3. When considering structures to support this curriculum, the working group should make a recommendation about whether a part-time general liberal arts completion program should be situated in the school of professional studies, offered for schedule bound working adults, or as a new Path in "Evergreen Classic"?

Points to consider:

- a. The possible cost/benefits of separate admissions for these students and the support they may get within the School of Professional Studies.
- b. The need for a structure to coordinate offerings that support degree-seeking, time-bound students or part-time students (e.g., a system for online faculty coordination, a designated coordinator role, an advisory team, a FLEX center).
- c. Systems and policies to support the overall coherence of the undergraduate curriculum.
- d. Faculty assignments to teach this curriculum in the mode and time that support the adult students for whom this program is designed.

C. Flexible options for Paths: Lead: Lori Blewett

The curriculum in the Olympia undergraduate college will be offered primarily as in-person coordinated studies programs at 12 or 16 credits. This will remain the main mode instruction for the curriculum in Paths. However, it is critical that the college offer some 2 and 4 credit courses associated with Paths to complement the coordinated studies programs and to provide other options for students to gain basic skills and exposure to cross-disciplinary learning opportunities. It is not intended that these courses will necessarily provide part-time pathways to degree. Similarly, some courses and programs offered through a Path may be offered online or in a low residency format, but not all Paths will offer enough curriculum in this format to provide online-only pathways to degree. The charge to this group is to clarify the following:

Part-time options in Paths

1. Working with the EWS Dean, CAT leaders, other Path conveners, and the Vice Provost (who will establish faculty line allocations) identify the core 2 and 4 credit courses that are needed to support the Path curriculum.
 - i. The current 2 and 4 credit courses currently offered through EWS can be considered as a baseline. Additions to this curriculum will need to be prioritized and considered in relation to available lines for faculty.
 - ii. The deans will ultimately decide the number of lines for courses that can be allocated to each path. Approval of this curriculum will reflect a commitment by the college to hire adjuncts to staff this curriculum in cases where regular faculty are not available to teach it.

- iii. Courses should be listed in Paths plans, with consideration for scheduling in evenings and/or during the day, at times that provide flexible choices for students.
 - iv. The workgroup should recommend block scheduling times for any courses offered in the day to minimize conflicts with coordinated studies programs scheduled in the day.
 - v. Regular faculty are encouraged to consider ways to structure their teaching to increase the number of 4 and 8 credit opportunities for students, such as by offering variable credit opportunities and modules in their programs and making these visible as course open for separate enrollment.
2. While we don't expect the 11 current undergraduate Paths, which are based primarily on full-time 12 or 16 credit coordinated studies programs, to have the ability to provide full *flexible pathways to a degree*, some regular faculty members may choose to offer part-time options as part of their Path teaching. If there is a regular commitment to providing part-time offerings, this curriculum should be included in the annual Path reports, including the names of regular faculty affiliated with the Path who have made a commitment to teach part-time offerings. These Paths would not be listed as pathways to a degree for part-time only students unless beginning, intermediate, and advanced part-time offerings were made available consistently. However, any part-time curriculum will be listed as being available to part-time students who wish to follow their own Path.

Online/Low residency options in Paths

1. It is not an expectation that the 11 current undergraduate Paths can offer enough online offerings at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels for students to follow a pathway to a degree entirely online. However, some Paths may choose to provide some of their curricular offerings online or in a low residency form. If Faculty teaching in Paths make a regular ongoing commitment to teaching online or in a low residency format, this should be included in the yearly Path plans. These plans need to be approved by the curriculum deans, to ensure the college has sufficient faculty lines and capacity to retain a robust in-person curriculum alongside any online curriculum.
2. To meet accreditation standards, Faculty teaching online need to meet the professional development requirements established by the college to do so. This is one of our accreditation standards.
3. Evergreen Tacoma, Native Pathways and the Graduate Programs within the College of Graduate and Professional Studies, should review their curriculum and degrees to see if it is feasible to offer curriculum online, or add online or low-residency cohorts to their existing programs. The Native Pathways Program already has the Salish Sea cohort as such a model.

D. Support for Online and Low residency Pathways to a degree. Leads: Lori Blewett and Julia Metzker

By Spring 2022, the workgroup should bring recommendations on how to support the following goals:

1. Develop a recommendation for an online and remote teaching policy that covers the approval process for offering online classes, and recommendation for related policies that should be addressed through the faculty handbook or the CBA such as faculty training, seat time polices, etc. The teaching load and compensation structure for those teaching online is a work condition that would need to be worked out in bargaining.
2. Recommend system changes to help make current and prospective students aware of online pathways to a degree.
3. Establish recommendations for high touch student support services that are offered online, asynchronously and synchronously at flexible times.
4. Recommend student policies for online courses, programs and pathways to degree, such as enrollment status, registration priorities and tuition for out of state students studying online.
5. Establish how we identify, track and support students pursuing a degree through our online curriculum.

E. Design two new Interdisciplinary Paths, one related to Business, Leadership and Entrepreneurship and one related to Health, Wellness, and Psychology, with Flexible Options to a degree. Leads:

Larry Geri and Elizabeth Williamson working with regular and adjunct faculty in these areas.

Work with faculty (and consultants from other institutions) to design full undergraduate flexible pathways to degree for Business/Leadership/Entrepreneurship and Health/Wellness/Counselling/Psychology (names TBA). Initial Paths based on curriculum already planned for 21-22 should be ready for publication by the end of summer 21. Longer term plans, including proposals for additional curriculum and hires should be proposed by the end of fall quarter 21.

These Path should be comprised of a coherent combination of the following types of offerings:

1. 16 and 12 credit coordinated studies programs taught by full-time regular faculty hired to Olympia Undergraduate who agree to affiliate with and teach programs in these paths.
2. A coherent set of sequenced 4 credit courses at the beginning intermediate and advanced levels.
3. Online and Low residency certificate programs, particularly in areas connected to professional studies and career opportunities in these fields.

For each Path

1. Establish the minimum number of faculty lines across all types of offerings needed to support the path, including the number of lines the college needs to commit to adjuncts teaching courses, and in which disciplines.
2. The Path design should include part-time online pathways to a micro-credential or a degree.
3. Build explicit connections to courses taught at local community colleges, exploring the possibility of co-listing offerings in partnership with those institutions.