

Chadron State, Peru State, and Wayne State Colleges

Proposal to Add an Associate of General Studies Degree Option

1. Descriptive Information

- A. Name of Institution: Chadron State College, Peru State College, Wayne State College
- B. Name of Program: Associate of General Studies (AGS)
- C. Degree to be awarded to graduates of the program: Associate of General Studies (AGS)
- D. Other programs offered in this field by the institution: N/A
- E. CIP code: 24.0102
- F. Administrative units for the program: Academic Affairs Offices
- G. Proposed delivery site(s) and type(s) of delivery, if applicable: Courses delivered both on-campus and online
- H. Proposed date (term/year) the program will be initiated: Fall 2025
- I. Description of Program:

The Associate of General Studies (AGS) is a new degree offering proposed to address individuals who have attended one of the Nebraska State Colleges and earned a significant number of undergraduate credits, but who have stopped attending before earning a bachelor's degree. While most degree programs are made available to incoming students as a potential major and establish a specific set of courses that meet the intent of the academic major, the AGS degree is solely eligible to students who are no longer attending the State College.

The intent of this degree is to recognize the time, money, and effort that these students committed to the credits they have earned that have not resulted in a credential. This is not a program for which the College would recruit students; instead, the degree is awarded post-facto and is solely available to former students who fully meet the requirements listed below through their coursework completed prior to leaving a State College.

Former students who are awarded the associate degree are expected to have increased social and economic mobility as a direct result of the credential. In addition, these additional credential holders positively impact the state's 70% attainment goal for its residents. While not a part of this proposal, the State Colleges are also considering incentives to encourage those who earn the associate degree to "finish what they started" and return to the College to complete the requirements for a bachelor's degree.

Proposed Student Eligibility Requirements:

- Attended a Nebraska State College but is not currently attending
- Earned a minimum of 70 undergraduate credit hours
- Has not attended the College for at least one year
- Has not earned an associate degree prior to attending the State College
- Is not eligible for an associate degree from a Nebraska Community or Tribal College, the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, or the University of Nebraska, through a reverse transfer process (e.g. earned 15 credits or more at the two-year institution prior to transferring to a State College)
- Has not earned a bachelor's degree from the State College
- Has not earned an associate or bachelor's degree from another institution after attending the State College (as identified through National Student Clearinghouse)

Proposed Associate of General Studies Degree Requirements:

- Completed a minimum of 70 undergraduate credit hours with a C- or above grade
- Completed a range (15 to 42 credit hours) of courses and experiences aligned to the areas of:
 - Quantitative/Logical Reasoning
 - Effective Communication
 - Critical Inquiry and Creative Problem Solving
 - Cultural, Aesthetic, and Creative Arts
 - Human Behavior and Society
- Completed a minimum of 15 credits at the State College
- Holds a minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA

This new degree option is informed by the recent [Colorado Re-Engaged \(CORE\) Initiative](#) established by the state's legislature, which gives the authority for state universities to confer this degree, based upon similar degree requirements. The Colorado Legislature recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic forced many students, especially those from low-income communities, to stop attending prior to earning a degree. These 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.

Data gathered by the Colorado Department of Higher Education indicated over 25,000 Coloradans might be eligible for the CORE associate degree. The perceived benefits of offering this degree included recipients' access to higher-paying jobs and more secure employment, an increase in the overall number of Coloradans with academic credentials and degrees, and a greater probability of recipients returning to higher education to complete a bachelor's degree or higher.

In researching this opportunity for the Nebraska State Colleges, data reflect that **892** former students who stopped attending one of the State Colleges prior to Fall 2023 tentatively meet the eligibility requirements listed above for the AGS degree. From this group, further analysis will require the Colleges to review each eligible student's transcript and identify those students who fully meet the proposed degree requirements outlined above. The opportunity for these individuals to receive the AGS degree is perceived to have a similar impact to those identified by the CORE program and would clearly address Nebraska's recently established 70% Attainment Goal for holding a higher education credential. Should this proposal be approved and the degree become available through the State Colleges, this initiative will be called ***Attain Nebraska***.

As noted above in the eligibility requirements, students who enrolled at the State Colleges as transfer students from a Nebraska Community or Tribal College, the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, or the University of Nebraska, will be further evaluated to determine whether they are potentially eligible to earn an associate degree from that institution, through a reverse-transfer process. If a transfer student has completed 15 credits or more of coursework from any single Nebraska two-year institution, the State Colleges would eliminate them from eligibility.

However, the State Colleges will collaborate with these institutions to establish a process by which those students' transcripts and contract information is sent to each respective Nebraska institution, via a designated representative, to support each institution's ability to reach out to them regarding a reverse transfer opportunity to earn an associate degree. Based upon the initial research completed for this proposal, **559** students are ineligible for this degree due to potential Nebraska reverse transfer eligibility with a Nebraska community or tribal college.

The State Colleges request this program be approved and remain in effect through academic year 2030. During the summer of 2030, consideration of continuation will occur, contingent on the analysis of program success. A report on the number of students who have been awarded the AGS degree, the number of students who have been awarded an associate degree through the reverse transfer process established with the Nebraska institutions, and the number of AGS awardees who were ultimately able to return to earn a bachelor's degree from the State Colleges will be provided to the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE).

2. Centrality to Role and Mission

This proposed Associate of General Studies (AGS) degree is consistent with the State Colleges' role and mission. The mission of the Nebraska State College System is to "serve our students, communities, and state by providing high quality, accessible educational opportunities." While our primary focus at the undergraduate level is to support students in their efforts to earn their chosen bachelor's degree, we also recognize that some students will experience challenges that deter them from meeting their educational goals.

Current state authorization supports the State Colleges in offering this degree. As stated in ***Nebraska Revised Statute 85-952***:

State colleges; programs permitted; limitations.

The state colleges may continue to deliver academic transfer and preprofessional **associate degree** programs for which a degree may be awarded if approved by the Board of Trustees of the Nebraska State Colleges and the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education pursuant to sections [85-1413](#) and [85-1414](#) upon demonstration of compelling need and unique capacity of the state colleges to offer such programs. The state colleges shall not independently award the associate degree, diploma, or certificate for applied technology education programs.

This program places priority on serving those students who have attended a State College by evaluating the academic work these students have completed and awarding a credential if the requirements are met. Awarding the AGS degree recognizes their efforts and reflects their accomplishments and may be the catalyst by which these individuals pursue additional credentials.

As the State of Nebraska faces strives to meet the 70% Attainment goal for its residents, the State Colleges wish to offer this new AGS program to support individuals who have completed a significant amount of undergraduate college credit hours but have no credential to show for their time and efforts. The Colleges clearly see this new AGS program to be central to the role and mission they serve for their service regions and the State as a whole.

3. Evidence of Need and Demand

A. Need for the program:

As the data above reflect, just under 900 individuals who attended the State Colleges potentially meet the requirements for this new degree based upon the eligibility requirements outlined above. These are students who initially applied to the State Colleges to pursue a bachelor's degree, but for some reason stopped attending prior to earning their chosen degree. Since these requirements meet institutional accreditation standards for awarding an associate degree, the conference of the degree would recognize the time, commitment, and effort spent on the courses these individuals have completed. Awarding them the AGS credential may allow for expanded employment opportunities and encourage them to pursue additional degrees.

In addition, the State of Nebraska recently established a 70% Attainment Goal for residents to hold a degree or credential beyond the high school diploma. Recognizing the efforts of these individuals with the Associate of General Studies degree would work toward this goal.

The awarding of this AGS degree does not infringe upon the community colleges' academic offerings, as students who attend the State College cannot choose to complete this degree. The degree is solely available under the eligibility and degree requirements for students who were initially pursuing a bachelor's degree at a State College, but for some reason had to discontinue their studies. The State Colleges believe that the time and effort spent toward earning those degrees should be recognized if they meet the requirements for an accredited higher education credential.

In addition to those students who would be eligible for this degree from a State College, there are an additional 559 students who might also be eligible to receive an associate degree from the initial two-year institution they attended prior to transferring to a State College. The State Colleges will collaborate with these Nebraska institutions to ensure they have the necessary information to review and consider these students for an award.

B. Demand for the Program:

As stated above, almost 900 individuals stopped attending one of the State Colleges prior to Fall 2023 and meet the proposed eligibility requirements for the AGS degree. For these individuals, the ability of the State Colleges to award this degree would result in each holding a credential beyond the high school diploma and potentially expanding their future employment and educational opportunities. Once the initial cohort of eligible students has been contacted in relation to this degree opportunity, the State Colleges will run an eligibility report during each fall and spring term to identify additional students who meet the eligibility requirements, and the opportunity to apply for this degree would be communicated to those who meet the established degree requirements.

4. Adequacy of Resources

A. Faculty and Staff Resources:

Since the AGS degree is post-facto, there is no impact on faculty and staff resources beyond running an eligibility report each term, reviewing these students' transcripts in relation to the established degree requirements, and notifying those students who fully meet the AGS degree requirements to invite them to apply for the credential. Should students respond and apply for the degree, those applications will be processed as part of the larger commencement activities each term.

B. Physical Facilities:

No impact on physical facilities

C. Instructional Equipment and Informational Resources:

No impact on instructional equipment and informational resources.

D. Budget Projections for the first five years of program:

Please note that the uniqueness of this degree program does not establish a revenue-generating program, as all of the requirements for the degree will have already been met through the academic work completed during the student's prior attendance as a bachelor's degree-seeking student. The primary intent of this program is to provide individuals with a credential that reflects the time, money, and effort spent toward earning a bachelor's degree at once of the State Colleges.

EXPENSES

There are minimal expenses for offering the Associate of General Studies degree. Data analysis reports will be run each term to identify eligible recipients for the degree, and from there a review of their transcripts will be completed in relation to the established degree requirements. Should a student fully meet the requirements, communication will be sent to individuals for their consideration. If the individual chooses to apply for the AGS degree, their application will be processed with existing student graduation applications. Reports for each Nebraska institution that identify former State College students who may potentially be eligible for a reverse transfer degree will also be run and provided to each institution's identified representatives each term once the analysis has been completed, along with those students' transcripts.

REVENUE

There is no revenue for offering the AGS degree, as all required courses for the degree have already been completed. The graduation application fee which is expected as part of the application process will be waived for AGS candidates.

5. Avoidance of Unnecessary Duplication

While other states have explored and developed a comparable Associate of General Studies degree, there is no such degree currently offered in Nebraska, based upon the proposed eligibility requirements. As such, this degree proposal is a unique opportunity for students who have attended the State Colleges and left prior to earning a credential.

6. Consistency with the Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education

The Associate of General Studies (AGS) degree at Chadron State, Peru State, and Wayne State Colleges aligns to the CCPE's Comprehensive Statewide Plan by offering an academic program that addresses the workforce challenges currently facing the State of Nebraska. The CCPE Plan notes that "Postsecondary education in Nebraska will be responsive to the workforce development and ongoing training needs of employers and industries to build and sustain a knowledgeable, trained, and skilled workforce in both rural and urban areas of the state." The awarding of the AGS degree provides these individuals with additional employment opportunities and a credential on which to build. Offering this degree would also positively impact the critical workforce shortage that Nebraska is currently facing.

The CPPE Plan also notes the importance of post-secondary's ability to be innovative in addressing the needs of the State: "Postsecondary education institutions will assess evolving needs and priorities of the students and people of Nebraska in a timely manner and will adopt new methods and technologies to address them." The State Colleges' development of the Associate of General Studies degree is focused upon a new credential that attempts to recognize the time, money, and effort that prior State College students committed toward completion of a bachelor's degree at one of the Colleges and award a credential for their efforts made prior to leaving the State College.