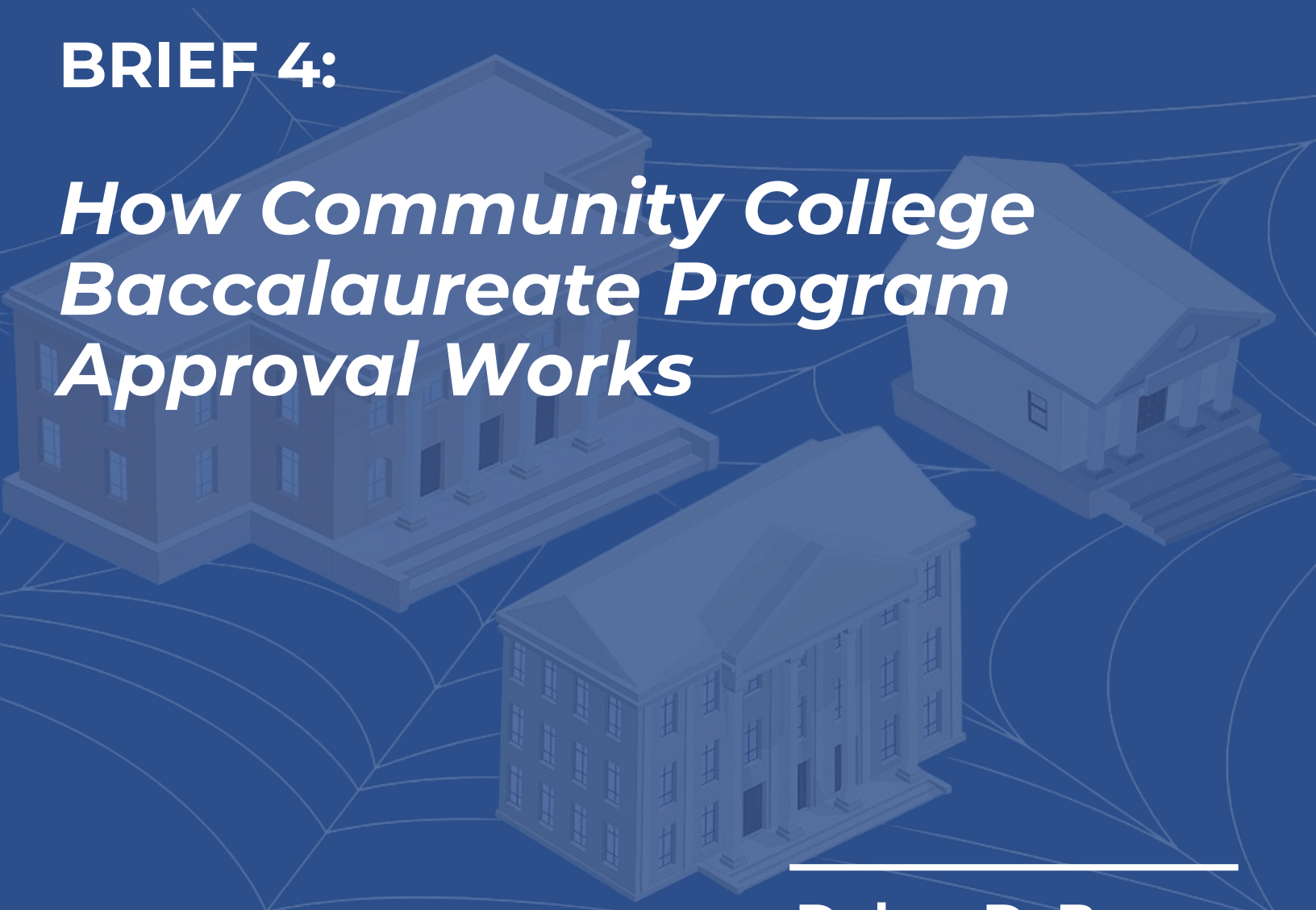
2026

The State Leadership Playbook for Planning and Implementing Community College Baccalaureate Degree Programs

BRIEF 4:

How Community College Baccalaureate Program Approval Works



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About This Brief

Community college baccalaureate (CCB) program approval processes determine which programs are offered, whom they serve, and how extensively CCB degrees can scale in a state. This brief translates research findings on CCB program approval from Bragg (2025) to assist state and system leaders, college personnel, and local boards of trustees on CCB program processes and policies.

The study analyzed public documentation on state and local approval policies in 13 states that confer most CCB degrees in the United States, using Venters' (2021) framework, which organizes approval measures into two categories: program quality and resource use. Three findings are presented:

1. State legislation sets approval parameters. Approval occurs at the local, state, and/or system and accreditor levels through three phases: notice of intent, formal program application, and review and decision-making.
2. All states require evidence of occupational supply and demand, although data and methods differ substantially across the country. States with some of the largest CCB offerings administer some of the most extensive approval methods and evidence requirements.
3. States with longer experience assessing program duplication have moved toward multiple measures, emphasizing regions where new programs will be offered. These measures prioritize geographic access and affordability for student populations with historically lower bachelor's attainment rates, rather than curricular overlap alone.

The brief includes a self-assessment tool for reviewing current or proposed approval processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Use meaningful measures for CCB program approval.**
2. **Ensure decisions on program duplication rest on relevant and rigorous evidence.**
3. **Use standardized occupational supply and demand analysis requirements.**
4. **Build structured constituent involvement in the CCB program approval process.**
5. **Regularly evaluate and improve the CCB approval process.**
6. **Use the CCB Program Approval Self-Assessment Tool.**

Introduction: Program Approval Processes

Community college baccalaureate (CCB) degree programs are growing in the United States, with 24 states and 214 community colleges approved to confer one or more of these programs in the latest national CCB program inventory (Meza & Vo, 2026). These programs launch in authorized states after they have successfully passed one or more formal approval processes. These processes assess the need for the new CCB program and green-light detailed plans for a program's design, development, and implementation to create a pathway for students to earn a bachelor's degree.

Program approval requirements are extensive in many states conferring CCB degrees. Multiple factors affect how the approval works, but it typically includes approval from local trustees, state agencies, higher education and community college systems, and national institutional accreditation. Far from a compliance exercise, CCB program approval is a policy lever to shape the direction and pace of CCB implementation and scale-up across a state.

This brief translates findings from recent research on CCB program approval policies and processes in the United States. The discussion addresses approval policies and processes for states beginning to approve new CCB programs, as well as states seeking to improve existing CCB program approval processes. The primary audience includes administrators and staff with leadership roles at the state and system levels, as well as college administrators, board members, and faculty who contribute to CCB program approval at the institutional level.

CCB program approval processes assess the need for the new CCB program and green-light detailed plans for a program's design, development, and implementation to create a pathway for students to earn a bachelor's degree.

Why an Effective CCB Program Approval Process Matters

Robust approval processes are a vital step in creating quality CCB programs that can have the biggest impact on students and communities. Formal approval processes determine which CCB programs are offered and who these programs should recruit and serve. Inadequate processes slow down or sometimes even stall CCB program development and may also result in CCB programs with disappointing outcomes. By contrast, well-designed CCB program approval processes advance bachelor's programs designed with positive student outcomes, economic benefits, and social impact in mind (Pawlicki et al., 2023). Efficacious CCB program approval decisions depend on rigorous evidence demonstrating that a proposed program is needed to close a gap in bachelor's degree options.

Moreover, well-designed program approval applications identify students historically underserved by traditional bachelor's programs (Love & Palmer, 2020), often linking CCB programs to improving the economic circumstances of students identified as beneficiaries. This argument is most compelling when applications clearly show how students served by CCB programs can continue living and working in the communities they call home (Meza & Bragg, 2025; Pawlicki, forthcoming).

But what measures does a "well-designed" program approval process include? This brief describes findings from research on CCB program approval (Bragg, 2025) using a framework Venters (2021) developed for the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) Association. Venters applied the higher education program approval framework to state higher education systems, focusing on these two sets of measures:

- **Program quality:** programmatic features related to curriculum and instruction, teaching and learning, outcomes assessment, accreditation, faculty qualifications, and student supports.
- **Resource use:** program features related to facilities, budgeting and costs, employer demand and partnerships, and regional coordination of higher education.

Taken together, these measures offer a comprehensive framework useful for planning, implementing, and improving CCB program approval policies and processes.

What Research Tells Us About CCB Program Approval

This brief relies on research on CCB program approval in 15 states that confer the vast majority of bachelor's degrees offered across the United States (Bragg, 2025): Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Wyoming, and Washington. The appendix provides links to the legislation and state and system CCB program approval policies and processes in these states.

Major findings, drawn from research on these 15 states, are discussed below, from the most general to the most specific implications for CCB program approval policies and processes:

State legislation creates the blueprint for CCB program approval policies and processes.

Although exceptions exist, most states require legislation to authorize community colleges capped at the associate degree to start awarding bachelor's degrees. Embedded in these laws is the rationale for a state's adoption of CCB degrees, setting the parameters for how these programs will operate and whom they should serve, and specifying the form by which assessment, evaluation, and accountability will be employed to ensure they address the public need and deliver on their promise. Meaningful translation of state legislative intent into actionable program approval mechanisms is an important first step in creating an effective CCB program approval process.

CCB program approval processes rely on varied forms of evidence-based case-making.

States require multiple steps in their CCB program approval processes, with varying measures, data and evidence, and methods to make the case for a new CCB program. Quantitative data on student interest and need, occupational supply and demand, and fiscal responsibility are common to state CCB program approval processes. Also, most states require qualitative narratives explaining the proposed program that speak to the purpose of the program and how it is expected to broaden access for regional student populations that will be prepared to enter or advance in regional labor markets. CCB program applications that make a compelling case for a new program with robust data and documentation are best positioned to gain state approval.

Measures used for state CCB program approval vary by scope and type.

States that have scaled CCB programs to most of their community colleges tend to use a program approval process tailored specifically for CCB degrees, while states approving a few institutions or CCB programs tend to use the same program approval processes that are used by the rest of higher education systems and institutions in the state. CCB-specific program approval measures focus on program content, student populations served, and the student, workforce, and employer impact expected as a result of CCB program implementation. A few states also require an assessment of impact on the state's higher education structure and policy landscape as CCB programs grow.

CCB program approval happens on multiple levels.

The local community college, state and/or system bodies of higher education and community college education, and accreditors and licensing bodies play varied roles in CCB program approval, depending on state governance and structure. A first step toward approval often involves local boards of trustees, which determine whether a CCB program application should advance to the state or system level or, in a few cases like Arizona and Michigan, approve new CCB programs outright. However, states without state or system approval are rare, meaning program applications are scrutinized at the local and state levels before a final decision is made to allow a new CCB program to be developed. When a CCB program is the first offered by a community college, nationally recognized accreditors also assess substantive change, which is discussed in the next paragraph.

Nationally recognized accreditors determine institutional substantive change.

Nationally recognized accreditors, such as the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), assess "substantive change" — that is, when any community college previously accredited to confer associate degrees as the highest degree seeks to confer a first bachelor's degree. This substantive change process is comprehensive, as is reflected in guidance from the HLC (2020), which maintains community colleges seeking to confer bachelor's degrees should meet four criteria: (1) mission; (2) ethical and responsible conduct; (3) institutional effectiveness, resources, and planning; and (4) teaching and learning. Community colleges that undergo this accreditation process must set aside time and resources required to successfully navigate this quality assurance function.

States universally emphasize that proposed CCB programs demonstrate their ability to fill workforce gaps.

All states require community colleges to make a case for their proposed CCB program on the grounds of regional economic and workforce gaps, although a case for a state-level CCB program may be made. Some states also align CCB program approval processes with postsecondary career-technical education (CTE), which also uses occupational supply and demand analysis methods. While no state relies on case-making for CCB programs using workforce need alone, some form of these measures are used in all state or system approval processes.

Concerns with program duplication evolve over time, lessening as states gain experience with CCB program approval.

States evolve in their assessment of whether proposed CCB programs are duplicative of other existing college and university programs. States having longevity with authorizing CCB programs, such as Colorado, Florida, Texas, and Washington, use a range of measures, including occupational supply and demand, along with the students' geographic and financial access in the region. Evolved approaches recognize that two programs with identical content are not necessarily duplicative if they serve different regions or reach students who would otherwise lack access to that program. Thus, a determination of program duplication is based on multiple measures, such as workforce alignment, geographic access, and affordability, that are already required in the full program approval process.

States having longevity with authorizing CCB program ***base their program duplication determination based on multiple measures,*** *such as workforce alignment, geographic access, and affordability.*

CCB Program Approval Processes

This section discusses how CCB program approval works in 13 of the 15 states in the study, excluding Delaware and Michigan, where detailed information on program approval was inaccessible to apply Venters' framework to the analysis. Figure 1 provides a linear graphic representation of three major phases of CCB program approval:

- **Phase 1: Notice of Intent**
- **Phase 2: Program Application Process**
- **Phase 3: Review and Approval Decision**

Figure 1. CCB Program Approval Process Flow



Note: *Measures associated with* ***program quality are shaded in blue****, and measures associated with* ***resource use are shaded in purple.***

PHASE 1: Notice of Intent

A Notice of Intent (NOI) — or pre-application — sets the CCB program approval process in motion in most states, although there is considerable variation in the formality of the notification process. NOIs typically include the proposed program name, degree type, and a brief narrative making the case for the need for a new CCB program. Some data demonstrating need may be included at this early stage, but it is typically less extensive than data required in the formal CCB program application. Notification periods of 30 to 60 days are typical, although some states extend this period to 90 days or more in selected cases where a proposed program is anticipated to require a fuller comment period, to give ample time for a state agency, system offices, and/or higher education institutions to know that a CCB program application may be forthcoming.

Employing all of the aforementioned aspects of the NOI, Oregon's CCB program approval process uses two phases, beginning with a declaration of intent (DOI), which initiates a 60-day engagement and consultation period. The second phase requires a statement of need (SON), submitted at least 60 days after the DOI period ends, and this SON requires a deeper explanation of the program's need, including data on occupational supply and demand. These materials are submitted to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development and culminates in notifying the community college applicant on whether to proceed with a full CCB program application. The state may also provide guidance on additional rationales, data, and explanations to include in the application that would make the CCB program proposal more viable.

A Notice of Intent — or pre-application — sets the CCB program approval process in motion in most states, although there is considerable variation in the formality of the notification process.

PHASE 2: The CCB Program Application Process

In Phase 2, the major focus is on preparing a formal CCB program application required for state or system review, typically including data and documentation addressing multiple measures. This application is submitted to the designated authority of the state, higher education system, or, in a couple states, local boards of trustees only.

Many CCB program application processes include measures associated with program quality and resource use, consistent with Venters' framework. Figure 1, provided earlier in this brief, shows three sets of measures aligned to program quality (blue circles) and resource use (purple circles) associated with CCB program approval by states:

Program Quality

- Program design
- Student demand, access, and equity
- Community impact

Examples:

- *Program design (name, majors, degree types)*
- *Delivery mode*
- *Learning outcomes and assessment*
- *Faculty qualifications*
- *Program implementation*
- *Evaluation*

Resource Use

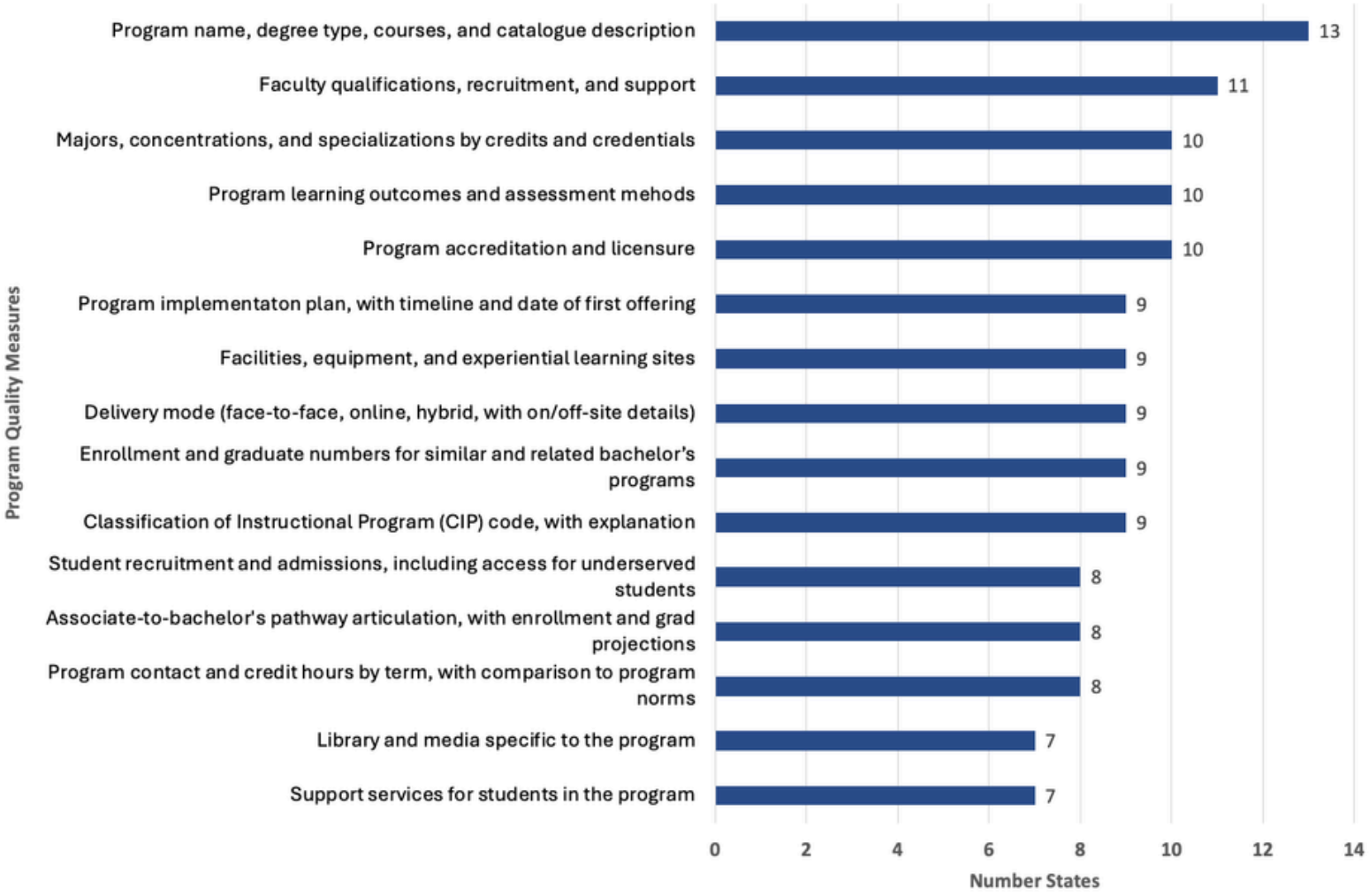
- Workforce need and economic impact
- Regional coordination, including addressing duplication
- Resources and sustainability

Examples:

- *Regional occupational supply and demand analysis*
- *Student cost and affordability*
- *Impact on graduate employment*
- *Impact on existing community college program budgets*

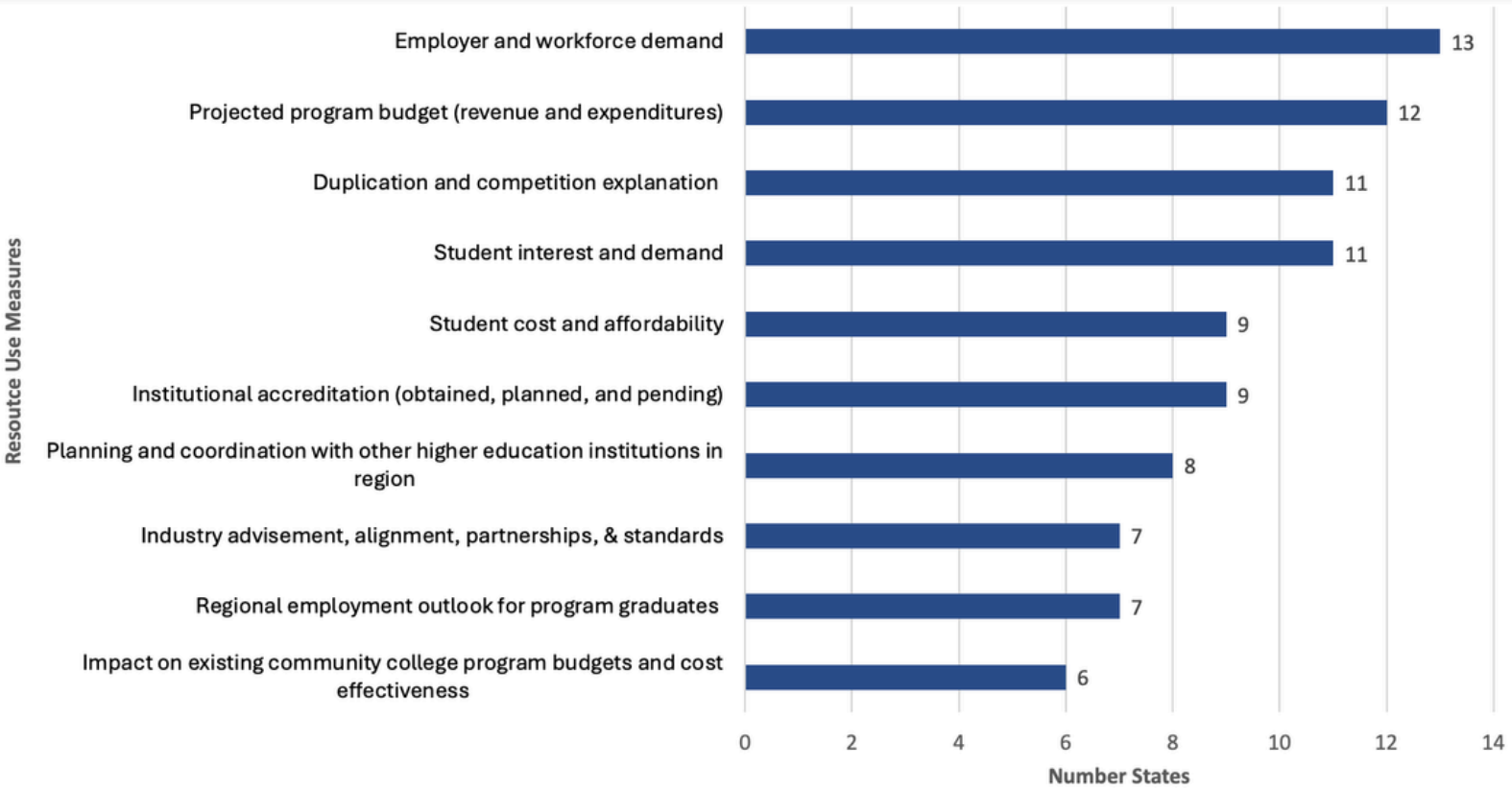
Overall, among the 13 states where CCB program approval processes are sufficiently detailed to conduct research, 7 or more use 15 measures of program quality (Figure 2), and 6 or more include 10 measures of resource use (Figure 3). More detail on the original study results is available here (see Tables 1 and 2), and greater description of these measures of program quality and resource use follow.

Figure 2. Number of States Adopting Measures of Program Quality in CCB Program Approval



Note: *This analysis focuses on 13 states with sufficiently detailed measures on program quality to assess their adoption in current CCB program approval processes.*

Figure 3. Number of States Adopting Measures of Resource Use in CCB Program Approval



Note: *This analysis focuses on 13 states with sufficiently detailed measures on resource use to assess their adoption in current CCB program approval processes.*

Program Quality — Program Design. Measures associated with program identification (e.g., name, degree type, course titles) are extensive in most CCB program applications. The Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) code and credit hours are also required universally, with most states requiring plans for: faculty qualifications and recruitment; program accreditation and licensure; student recruitment, enrollment, and graduation projections for the CCB program and similar bachelor's programs in the region; learning outcomes and assessment; and transfer and articulation from the associate and bachelor's level within the community college. Florida and Washington are examples of states that deploy an extensive set of program quality measures, and all colleges in these states offer one or more CCB programs.

A strong emphasis on program quality and design is also evident in the Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA) initiative to create a quality framework for CCB programs (CCBA, n.d.). Using a grassroots approach, the CCBA has worked with community college leaders and practitioners nationwide to identify 10 program quality elements integral to high-quality CCB programs. An extensive review of the literature on CCB programs foundational to this work by Pawlicki et al. (2023) points to the importance of programming customized to meet student, workforce, and community needs.

Program Quality — Student Demand, Access, and Equity. Nearly all states require evidence of student need and interest, including data on interest among current community college students and associate-degree alumni, as well as other prospective students who may seek to enroll in the proposed CCB program. Many states require detailed descriptions of the student populations the proposed CCB program will serve, with a few including student success-focused measures supporting degree completion. For example, criterion 4 in the Washington CCB program approval process requires colleges to describe specific supports for historically underserved students.

Some states' CCB-authorizing legislation emphasizes access for designated student populations, such as adult learners, first-generation students, and other minoritized populations, although CCB programs are open to all qualified applicants. Other aspects of access emphasized in some state CCB program approval processes include how the proposed program will affect geographic access and affordability, estimating the relative cost of a CCB degree relative to a bachelor's degree from other higher education institutions in the region (Meza, 2025; Meza & Pawlicki, 2025; Meza, 2026).

Sometimes the groundwork for enrolling underserved students in CCB programs is recognized with state law. Looking again at Washington, legislation authorizing community college bachelor of science (BS) programs in computer science (CS) sets an expectation that these programs enroll and graduate student populations that have been underrepresented in existing CS programs in the state. Passed in 2021, S.B. 5401 identifies the student populations that these programs are expected to enroll to prepare for employment in a critical industry sector of the state.

Program Quality — Community Impact. Though less common than the other five measures associated with CCB program approval included in this discussion, a few states require applicants to address how the proposed program will benefit communities within the region most affected by CCB programs, mostly speaking to economic impact, but also educational, social, and cultural aspects of life in the region. The broader statement of impact may include ways these degrees influence educational attainment, including retaining residents to work in the region who are able to contribute to civic responsibilities. This focus on the greater good that CCB programs may influence is consistent with the Achieving the Dream (ATD) community vibrancy framework that emphasizes "expanding access to higher education and lowering costs for students, creating greater social and economic mobility for more learners and their families, and helping communities flourish across a broad range of measures."

Resource Use — Workforce Need and Economic Impact. All states require evidence of employer demand using labor market supply (Harmon, 2024), but states vary in the data and methods for CCB supply and demand analysis needed for program appoval. Many states emphasize regional supply and demand analysis where the proposed CCB program is implemented within a community district or designated region of the state where graduates are expected to have strong employment opportunities close to home. Supply and demand analysis tends to focus on regional need, given the rich diversity of communities where CCB programs are offered. Nearly half of the existing CCB programs in the country are located in rural, town, small-city, and small suburban locations (Meza & Vo, 2026), where local context, including distance, can affect students' decisions about whether to enroll in college or not.

Two states that provide some of the most structured guidance on occupational supply and demand pertaining to CCB program applications are Florida and Ohio. These processes include Florida's data expectations and analytical methods, which offer tables and calculations standardizing reports on workforce demand, unmet need, and supply. Ohio's process for identifying workforce need and a workforce gap recommends using data from the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation and other state agencies. Ohio community colleges must also engage "regional educational providers to discuss regional workforce needs, possible benefits to the region, concerns about potential duplication and program overlaps, and options for articulated pathways (2+2 or 3+1), as appropriate" (Ohio Department of Higher Education, 2022, p. 2). The detailed specifications in Ohio's CCB program application, using standardized methods to generate numeric estimates of program graduates relative to workforce needs including current shortages and anticipated growth, is a potentially valuable model for other states.

A new guide for assessing occupational supply and demand pertaining to proposed CCB programs using publicly accessible data is forthcoming. This guide will complement the occupational supply and demand tool developed by Harmon (2024) that relies on the Lightcast™ data platform, a data tool for those who have a subscription but not universally accessible.

Resource Use — Regional Coordination, Including Duplication. Many states require institutions to coordinate program offerings by region, recognizing factors like institutional capacity and student access vary across a state. Deliberate communications about collegiate programs of study by degree types, including transfer and articulation policies and processes, help sustain a functional system of community college and university baccalaureate providers.

Assessing program duplication is often part of regional coordination within states that considers whether and how CCB programs will contribute to meeting student, regional employer, and community needs. Program duplication decisions also often reflect geographic variation in higher education capacity within states due to distance and place, given that major determinants of college attendance are where students live and the distance they must travel from home to college to participate in higher education (Hillman 2019, 2023).

Florida and Texas provide useful examples of how two states address regional coordination relative to CCB programs. First, the Florida Department of Education requires that CCB applications include evidence that the college has held need, demand, and impact discussions with public state universities and other regionally accredited providers in the service district. Public universities and private institutions are granted time — 60 days and 30 days, respectively — to object or submit an alternative proposal that addresses unmet need. These alternative proposals are required to address whether students can complete the degree in the region, the institution's financial commitment, faculty collaboration, and student cost. Taking this information into account, the state board makes a decision on whether to approve a CCB program.

Texas also uses the state board to review and approve new CCB programs, using similar rules to CCB program approval as four-year institutions in the state. In this case, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) determines whether a proposed CCB program unnecessarily duplicates other institutions' programs and bars authorization in a field where existing articulation agreements already meet the need. State staff notify institutions offering substantially similar programs in the same region within 60 days of receiving the CCB application, giving these institutions at least 30 days to comment on need and provide evidence of unnecessary duplication. The board determines the capacity of existing programs and the need for additional graduates in the field.

Resource Use — Resources and Sustainability.
Most states require program budget and expenditure projections for proposed CCB programs, but only a few request details on the projected total and projected sticker cost for students who enroll in CCB programs. Transparency about tuition and fees, along with total cost of attendance, provides a fuller picture of how proposed CCB programs will address student affordability concerns. To this point, Florida's program approval process requires applicants to estimate student tuition and fees for the proposed CCB program compared to the tuition and fees of public universities in the college's service district. Florida's process also requires documentation on the impact the new program's budget will have on existing institutional programs.

PHASE 3: Review and Decision Process

Review of CCB program applications varies, with some states and systems relying primarily on agency personnel and others engaging experts from outside the state or system. The primary research for this brief found that some CCB program approval processes involve practitioners and partners in the review process, sometimes beginning with the NOI phase. The original research did not find instances where students or alumni are involved in CCB program review, although such involvement is fairly rare in any higher education program review.

Looking at a state with a long history of CCB program approval, Florida underwent an extensive period of deliberation to improve its CCB program approval process, including revising key requirements like the supply and demand analysis and clarifying how forms of regional coordination and program duplication are assessed. Washington's Baccalaureate Leadership Council (BLC), California's Baccalaureate Degree Program (BDP) Workgroup, and Florida's practitioner input structure illustrate how practitioner involvement can ground the CCB program review process in practical realities.

Numerous states have modeled their CCB-authorizing legislation and program approval processes off of Florida, along with those of other CCB-conferring states, such as Texas and Washington. Policy-sharing is not new for many states adopting CCB degrees (Floyd & Skolnik, 2019), and strategic information-sharing across states provides a critical way to help more states implement and expand new CCB programs.

Finally, lessons from states conferring CCB degrees suggest the importance of formal, transparent mechanisms for submitting, reviewing, deciding, and communicating about CCB program approval. To this end, Washington's Baccalaureate Leadership Council provides a formal structure that enables practitioners to contribute to important decisions about CCB programs in the state, including the CCB program approval process.

Recommendations

To adopt or improve evidence-based CCB program approval policies and processes, states should consider the following six recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 1

Use meaningful measures for CCB program approval. Measures for CCB program approval should focus on program quality and resource use, including evidence-based explanations on how proposed CCB programs will enhance student access to bachelor's degrees in regions of the state underserved at the bachelor's level. Having said this, it is also important to note that not all 15 states discussed in this brief incorporate every measure of program quality and resource use. Therefore, states should intentionally select the measures most pertinent in their context and to their goals, with program applications typically focusing on curriculum and course offerings, program costs, student access and affordability, and expected impact on other institutional programs.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Ensure decisions on program duplication rest on relevant and rigorous evidence. States should recognize the many, complex factors that influence whether a proposed CCB program is duplicative of existing bachelor's programs. Curricular overlap should not be the sole criteria for determining duplication because it neglects to take into account student access associated with geography, cost, and admission constraints. Demonstrating need should take all these factors into account, using rigorous evidence to demonstrate that a proposed CCB program will produce qualified baccalaureate-level graduates to fill a critical workforce gap.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Use standardized occupational supply and demand analysis requirements. States should specify the data sources and methodologies that proposed CCB programs should use to estimate occupational supply and demand for a designated region (and when relevant, the state) where a program intends to enroll students. Rigorous methods for determining supply and demand relative to CCB programs include occupational supply and demand data specific to the proposed bachelor's program, transparent analytical methods, and standardized reporting. States and systems should ensure occupational supply and demand addresses these requirements and are well positioned to meet regional employer and student needs.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Build structured constituent involvement in the CCB program approval process. States should create mechanisms for various constituents to review and contribute to CCB program approval, including: state and system staff; college personnel and board of trustee members; regional employers and community leaders; and students and alumni. States demonstrating various approaches to constituent involvement include Washington's Baccalaureate Leadership Council (BLC) and Florida's practitioner input structures that tap institutional expertise to inform and improve state and system CCB program approval processes. States that employ these constituent engagement processes are poised to represent the grounded, multi-layered actions and decision-making that is needed to effectively approve these programs.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Regularly evaluate and improve the CCB approval process. CCB program approval applications and review processes should not remain static. States should conduct periodic reviews to ensure measures and methods used to approve programs are consistently aligned with the state's educational systems; workforce, community, and economic needs; and, evolving student needs and interests. Few states currently require continuous improvement plans for CCB program review, yet regular and rigorous review should be employed to ensure new CCB programs meet state and regional needs.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Use the CCB Program Approval Self-Assessment Tool. States should use the included program approval self-assessment tool to review their processes and make improvements. This tool, designed for assessing existing and proposed CCB program approval processes, emerged from the research conducted for this brief. It relies on a review of CCB program approval in all 24 states conferring these degrees, with more in-depth analysis of the CCB program approval in 13 states offering the most extensively detailed information on these policies and processes. The benefits of using the tool include a common set of self-assessment elements that follow the general pattern most states use to approve these programs, with opportunities to generate shared commentary and action.

Takeaways

CCB program approval processes are an important undertaking of state agencies, system offices, and local boards considering authorizing community colleges to confer bachelor's degrees. Despite the structural differences among the 24 states conferring these degrees, most states emphasize data and evidence linked to careful study and planning to demonstrate the regional economic and workforce needs for these programs. These states solicit input from a wide range of potential audiences who are expected to benefit from these programs, including prospective students and graduates; employer, workforce, and economic development providers; and community residents where these programs are to be offered. Most states recommend that planning begins well before a formal proposal is submitted, including benchmarking long-standing and high-quality CCB programs within and across state lines. States with longer experience approving CCB programs offer another lesson: CCB program approval processes should not be treated as static. As more states expand CCB authority, sustained research and cross-state policy exchange should be a priority to inform CCB program approval actions that set the pace for the scale-up of these degrees.

The CCB Program Approval Self-Assessment Tool

A tool for designing, assessing, and improving community college baccalaureate program approval processes

About This Tool

This self-assessment tool helps state leaders examine the current state of CCB program approval processes conducted by states, systems, and institutions. It can also be used to design new CCB program approval processes. The elements included in this tool are aligned to **Section 1: Notice of Intent (NOI), Section 2: CCB Program Application Process, and Section 3: Review Process.** Each section closes with reflection questions to gain a deeper understanding of intent, alignment, meaning, and benefit of the CCB program approval process.

INSTRUCTIONS

For each section, select the scale rating for each anchor description that most closely matches your system's current or proposed CCB program approval process. Then, record supporting evidence and a priority action in the space provided. The anchor descriptions are drawn from the state processes discussed in this brief and are meant to illustrate a range of processes, not to prescribe a single correct model. Users are encouraged to adapt the language to their context, including by adding elements.

The tool can be completed individually to capture one's own perspective, or by a team to reveal where perspectives align and diverge in ways that may lead to improvement.

SECTION 1: The Notice of Intent

__ **NOI is required by my state/system:** Continue with this section.
__ **NOI is not required by my state/system:** Jump to Section 2.

1. Informative CCB program description and initial statement of need.			
Not Addressed	**Emerging**	**Established**	**Exemplary**
A case for program approval, including program description, is not clearly specified at the NOI stage.	A brief program description and statement of need is required but not fully specified.	A structured narrative case for need is required, with a brief program description of workforce, student, and community need.	A staged case for need is required, including program description and statement of need to build the evidentiary record before submission of the full program application.
Evidence / current practice notes		***Priority action***	

2. Reasonable timeline for NOI review and comment.

Not Addressed	Emerging	Established	Exemplary
A defined review period is not clearly specified.	A review period exists but is inconsistently enforced or communicated.	A defined review window (e.g., 30–60 days) is published and consistently applied.	Review timelines are published, consistently applied, and scaled to address program features and complexity.

Evidence / current practice notes	***Priority action***

3. Actionable feedback on next steps.

Not Addressed	Emerging	Established	Exemplary
Applicants receive little substantive feedback or actionable advice on next steps.	Feedback is provided but is generic or inconsistent across applicants and offers limited direction on next steps.	Applicants receive substantive feedback aligned with program approval criteria, noting concerns and needed changes.	Feedback is substantive, timely, and explicitly linked to what the full application will need to demonstrate.

Evidence / current practice notes	***Priority action***

Section 1: The Notice of Intent
Reflection Questions

Questions
Will (or does, if already implemented) the NOI process give applicants a clear sense of what is expected of them to submit a full CCB program application?
Will (or does, if already implemented) the NOI process require an evidence-based statement of need to inform decisions to proceed to full CCB program applications?
What changes are needed to strengthen the NOI process?

SECTION 2: The CCB Program Application Process

The first two self-assessment items in this section *(next page)* ask you to evaluate the measures of CCB program quality and resource use (Venters, 2021). Program quality and resource use each have three sets of measures:

Program Quality

- Program design
- Student demand, access, and equity
- Community impact

Examples:

- *Program design (name, majors, degree types)*
- *Delivery mode*
- *Learning outcomes and assessment*
- *Faculty qualifications*
- *Program implementation*
- *Evaluation*

Resource Use

- Workforce need and economic impact
- Regional coordination, including addressing duplication
- Resources and sustainability

Examples:

- *Regional occupational supply and demand analysis*
- *Student cost and affordability*
- *Impact on graduate employment*
- *Impact on existing community college program budgets*

Please review pages 9-17 of this brief prior to continuing for additional information and examples on program quality and resource use.

4. Meaningful measures of program quality.

Not Addressed	Emerging	Established	Exemplary
Not specified.	Required, but the program quality measures are not clearly defined or specified.	Requirements and guidance on program quality measures are clearly defined and carefully specified.	Requirements and guidance on program quality measures are standardized and cross-checked against existing high-quality CCB programs.

Evidence / current practice notes	*Priority action*

5. Meaningful measures of resource use.

Not Addressed	Emerging	Established	Exemplary
Not specified.	Required, but the resource use measures are not clearly defined or specified.	Requirements and guidance on resource use measures are clearly defined and carefully specified.	Requirements and guidance on resource use measures are standardized and cross-checked against existing high-quality CCB programs.

Evidence / current practice notes	*Priority action*

6. Reasonable timeline for the formal CCB program application process.

Not Addressed	Emerging	Established	Exemplary
A timeline for the formal CCB program application is not specified clearly and enforced inconsistently.	A timeline exists for formal CCB program applications, but it is not consistently communicated or enforced.	A timeline for formal CCB program applications is published and consistently enforced.	A timeline for formal CCB program applications is published, consistently enforced, and scaled to address the strategic approval and scale-up of CCB degrees.

Evidence / current practice notes	*Priority action*

7. Standardized criteria, templates, and methods in the CCB program application.

Not Addressed	Emerging	Established	Exemplary
No standardized criteria, templates, and methods are used.	Standardized criteria, templates, and methods exist but are underdeveloped or are used inconsistently.	Standardized criteria, templates, and methods are used for all formal CCB program applications.	Standardized criteria, templates, and methods are paired with published review criteria and training for reviewers.

Evidence / current practice notes	*Priority action*

Section 2: The CCB Program Application Process
Reflection Questions

Questions
Will (or does, of already implemented) the CCB program approval process produce formal applications demonstrating clear and meaningful detail needed to advance to the review phase?
Will (or does, if already implemented) the CCB program approval process lead to the development and implementation of successful CCB programs?
What changes need to be made to improve the full CCB program application process?

SECTION 3: The Review Process

8. Transparent standards for decision-making on CCB program approval.

Not Addressed	Emerging	Established	Exemplary
Standards are not published or are unclear.	Standards exist but are not consistently published or applied.	Standards are published and consistently applied.	Standards are published, consistently applied, and periodically reviewed to ensure continued relevance.

Evidence / current practice notes	*Priority action*

9. Relevant qualitative and quantitative data used to approve (or deny) proposed CCB programs.

Not Addressed	Emerging	Established	Exemplary
Review relies primarily on applicant narrative without meaningful data.	Some data are used, but validity and reliability are not verified.	Review relies on valid, reliable data across design, implementation, and sustainability.	Data quality standards are explicit and applied consistently across all review dimensions.

Evidence / current practice notes	*Priority action*

10. Engaged and highly qualified state, system, institutional, and expert reviewers.

Not Addressed	Emerging	Established	Exemplary
Review is conducted by a single office or individual.	Multiple reviewers are involved, but qualifications or roles are undefined or inconsistently applied.	A set of reviewers is consistently vetted, trained, and engaged.	Reviewers and reviewer roles are formalized, including internal and outside experts.

Evidence / current practice notes	*Priority action*

11. Timely announcement of CCB program approval decisions.

Not Addressed	Emerging	Established	Exemplary
Decisions are not published.	Decisions are available on request but not proactively published.	Decisions are published and accessible.	Published decisions include rationale, enabling others to understand the status of CCB programs and learn from past approvals and denials.

Evidence / current practice notes	*Priority action*

12. Regular evaluation and improvement of the CCB program approval process.

Not Addressed	Emerging	Established	Exemplary
The approval process has not been revisited since it was established.	Changes occur but could be more transparent and systematically conducted.	Review of the approval process is scheduled on a regular timeline (e.g., every one, two, or three years).	Periodic review is scheduled, uses outcomes data from past program approval decisions, and results in documented process changes.

Evidence / current practice notes	***Priority action***

Section 3: The Review Process
Reflection Questions

Questions
Will (or does, if already implemented) the review process demonstrate a transparent, rigorous methodology and rationale for decisions rendered on proposed CCB programs?
What changes should be made to improve the CCB program review process?

About the Author



Dr. Debra D. Bragg is President of Bragg and Associates, Inc., an equity-minded consulting group dedicated to advancing student success in education and employment. During her career, she founded two community college research centers, Community College Research Initiatives at the University of Washington in Seattle (2016-2020) and the Office of Community College Research and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1989-2015) where she is Edward William and Jane Marr Gutgsell Endowed Professor emerita. Dr. Bragg's research focuses on transitions to and through education to employment. She has led national studies on a wide range of P-20 education policies, including developmental education, career-technical education and career pathways, transfer (vertical and reverse credit), and community college baccalaureates.

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Appendix

CCB Program Approval Legislation, State/System Authority, and Process Links

(Listed from earliest to most recent initial CCB state legislative authorization date)

State	CCB Legislation	State/System Authority for CCB Approval	Program Approval Process Links
Georgia	System change (1997)	University System of Georgia	Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia Policy Manual: 2.8 Institutional Mission; New Program Approval Resources
Nevada	System change (1999)	Nevada System of Higher Education	Board of Regents of the Nevada System of Higher Education Handbook, Title 4, Chapter 14, Section 10; Community College Baccalaureate Proposal Development and Review Process; New Academic Degree Program Approval Form: https://nshe.nevada.edu/system-administration/departments/asa/proposals/
Florida	S.B. 1162 (2001) S.B. 1716 (2008) FL S.S. 1007.33 (2023)	Florida Department of Education, Division of Florida Colleges Florida College System	Baccalaureate Approval and Accountability Process; Baccalaureate Proposal Approval Process (Flowchart)
Texas	S.B. 286 (2003) H.B. 2198 (2007) S.B. 2118 (2017)	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)	https://www.highered.texas.gov/new-program-development/
Oklahoma	System change (2004) Senate Bill 701	Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE)	Chapter 3, Academic Affairs Policy (December 7, 2023)

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Nevada	System change (1999)	Nevada System of Higher Education	Board of Regents of the Nevada System of Higher Education Handbook, Title 4, Chapter 14, Section 10; Community College Baccalaureate Proposal Development and Review Process; New Academic Degree Program Approval Form: https://nshe.nevada.edu/system-administration/departments/asa/proposals/
Florida	S.B. 1162 (2001) S.B. 1716 (2008) FL S.S. 1007.33 (2023)	Florida Department of Education, Division of Florida Colleges Florida College System	Baccalaureate Approval and Accountability Process; Baccalaureate Proposal Approval Process (Flowchart)
Texas	S.B. 286 (2003) H.B. 2198 (2007) S.B. 2118 (2017)	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)	https://www.highered.texas.gov/new-program-development/
Oklahoma	System change (2004) Senate Bill 701	Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE)	Chapter 3, Academic Affairs Policy (December 7, 2023)

State	CCB Legislation	State/System Authority for CCB Approval	Program Approval Process Links
Washington	H.B. 1794 (2005, 2008) S.B. 6355 (2010) H.B. 2483 (2012) S.B. 5928 (2016) S.B. 5401 (2021)	Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges	Bachelor's Degree Program Approval Process, including Program Proposal Template and Applied Baccalaureate Eternal Review Rubric
Colorado	S.B. 10-101 (2010) S.B. 14-004 (2014) H.B. 18-1086 (2018) H.B. 18-1300 (2018) H.B. 19-1153 (2019) C.R.S. 23-60-2011 (2024)	State Board of Community Colleges and Occupational Education (SBCCOE)	Colorado Community College System Program Approval Process
Michigan	H.B. 4496 (2012)	District board approval; No program approval by state	No documentation available on CCB program approval through public sources
California	S.B. 850 (2014) S.B. 1406 (2018) AB 927 (2021) SB 960 (2026) AB 2694 (2026)	Board of Governors and Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges	Baccalaureate Degree Program Application Materials
Delaware	System change (2015)	Delaware Technical Community College Board	No documentation available on CCB program approval through public sources
Idaho	H.B. 73 (2017) H.B. 217 (2023)	Idaho State Board of Education	Postsecondary Program Approval
Ohio	H.B. 49 (2018) S.B. 135 (2021)	Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE)	Proposal for permission to proceed to HLC and to the ODHE Program Approval Process for an Applied Bachelor's or BSN Degree Program

State	CCB Legislation	State/System Authority for CCB Approval	Program Approval Process Links
Oregon	S.B. 3 (2019) S.B. 523 (2023)	Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC)	Applied Baccalaureate Program Approval Process ORS 341.013 Applied Baccalaureate Degrees
Wyoming	S.F. 111 (2019)	Wyoming Community College Commission (WCCC)	Update on Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) Programs, including approval process overview; Chapter 6 Approval Functions
Arizona	S.B. 1453 (2021)	District board approval; No state program approval	No documentation found online

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