

# Centralia College Plans for Third Bachelor Degree Program

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Centralia College IT Program

Centralia College information technology Instructor Chris Carlson, center, works with students, Jason Costi, left, and William Ide during class on Wednesday afternoon in Centralia.

Centralia College will be offering a new bachelor's degree program if the accreditation agency currently considering it approves.

The new program lands in the information technology realm and focuses on application management.

Currently, college officials are waiting for the last step of the process before they can offer the program in fall 2016.

The new baccalaureate degree has already passed through the internal approval process, and has been approved by the State Board for Community & Technical Colleges.

The next step is for the regional accreditation agency, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, to review the document outlining changes to the program and to approve it.

The college plans to submit the required documents sometime next week and will likely hear back from the agency in 3 to 6 months.

“We cannot say in any way we have a program until we have that final approval,” John Martens, vice president of instruction, said.

The information technology bachelor’s degree is expanding on the associate’s degree program, Martens said.

As part of the approval process, the college has conducted a needs assessment and has mapped out the courses it would like to teach. It is still in the process of identifying and hiring faculty to administer the program.

At first, 20 students would be able to enroll in the bachelor’s degree program. Later, the potential for up to 60 students at the two levels is available.

Patrick Allison, the associate dean of information technology programs, said the program curriculum would center around application development, by either creating software or web-based applications, among other ventures. It would focus on the entire software lifecycle.

“Part of our methodology, or what we want to be teaching students, we call it the full meal deal. It’s basically all the way from the idea of a thing, all the way through creation, launching and at some point retiring that application,” Allison said.

Christian Bruhn, the dean of instruction and academic transfers, said the degree is more viable when compared to many universities who teach theory based principles.

“It’s practical for getting a job,” he said. “The purpose is to be able to hit the ground running and say you already have the experience to be able to compete within the workforce.”

The bachelor’s program, if approved, will be competitive and will focus on students with computer-based skills, such as software development, software engineering or web design, among others.

Not only does it target students who want to take IT into a four-year degree, but it also focuses on those already in the industry who want to further their education.

Allison said internships will be built into the degree and the interns will help develop programs for the campus as well as other areas.

“They’ll get that hands-on (experience),” he said, adding that it will help students build a good portfolio. “That goes back to the applied part of it. They are actually doing those things.”

Industry certifications may also be integrated into the program to meet what Allison said was a “trifecta of being able to impress potential employers that you are the right person for the job.”

Allison said the IT field has become one of the dominate workforces and is expected to continually see growth. By providing a degree based in IT to Centralia College students, he said those who graduate will have the opportunity to be in a high wage earning industry that is not place bound.

As part of the needs assessment, the college had to prove a program like this was warranted in the local area and would be utilized by potential students.

“The needs side of this is showing that it is needed in the community, that the program is actually supporting a void,” Bruhns said.

Martens said the new bachelor’s program would provide a viable degree option for students attending the college.