

NEW BACCALAUREATE SERIES

Updating the National Landscape: State Adoption of Community College Baccalaureate Degrees



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This is the third data note on the project *Scaling Community College Baccalaureate Degrees: The Equity Imperative*. The goal of this research is to examine degree-granting policies, institutional adoption, and program implementation related to community college baccalaureate (CCB) degrees in the United States. Given the changing policy context across the nation, this data note updates the current national landscape and provides additional information about CCB policy and program implementation. Trends in authorization of CCB degrees and implications for equity and diversity are also discussed.

TRENDS IN STATE POLICY ADOPTION OF CCB DEGREES

Since the turn of the century, the organizational structure of community colleges has changed, mainly in response to the shifting needs of the communities they serve (Townsend & Dougherty, 2006; Vaughan, 2006). Transforming some elements of college curriculum and credentialing at the community college level by authorizing the conferral of baccalaureate degrees is one change that has been unfolding for the past three decades. Bachelor's degrees offered by community and technical colleges eliminate a student's need to transfer to a different institution to advance beyond the associate degree. These degrees have existed on a relatively modest level for many years, but recently they have begun to expand to more states. Understanding the prevalence of CCB policies and programs is central to the analysis our team is conducting on the expansion of different forms of baccalaureate degrees conferred at two-year and four-year institutions.

CCB STATES AND CCB POLICY ADOPTION

The act of authorizing at least one two-year public institution to confer a baccalaureate degree is used here to define which states authorize the conferral of CCB degrees and to update the current count of CCB states. With recent legislative activity on CCB policies in six states between 2018 and 2019, a total of 23 states currently authorize public two-year predominant degree-granting institutions to confer baccalaureate degrees. These institutions—considered as two-year predominant degree-granting institutions by the Carnegie Classification of Higher Education Institutions®—are mostly community and technical colleges, but also two-year branch campuses in a few states. Regarding institutional implementation in the CCB states, a total of 121 two-year public institutions confer CCB degrees, which represents nearly 13% of the 941 public two-year community colleges in the nation reported by the American Association of Community Colleges (2019).¹ Whereas 23 states is a relevant

¹ The AACC (2019) reports a total of 1,051 institutions: 941 public, 35 tribal, and 75 independent institutions.

indicator of CCB conferral for the country, growth in state adoption of CCB policies has been happening at a steady pace for the last two decades.

Figure 1 shows the cumulative number of states authorizing CCB degrees over time. Instead of an accelerated expansion, the number of CCB states has increased relatively smoothly in most years from 1989 and 2019. Over this 31-year period, almost one state has been added per year (average of 0.74 states per year) with the exception of the years 2004 and 2018. In these two years, the number of authorizing states grew more rapidly, with four states adopting CCB policies in 2004, and four more in 2018. Some events that coincide with the years when there was higher growth in CCB policy adoption include: the foundation of the Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA) in 1999; the first CCBA conference in 2000; the creation of an ‘Of Like Minds’ initiative in 2004;² increased attention in the media; the emergence of research on the topic; and revitalized legislative campaigns in some states. Although these elements are not seen as having a causal impact on CCB policy approval, they provide some context for CCB policies around these dates.

After the 2018 spike in state adoption of CCB policies in four states (Idaho, Missouri, Ohio, and South Carolina), two more states (Wyoming and Oregon) followed suit as of September 2019. These six states approved CCB degrees through state statutes that authorized all community and technical colleges to confer the degree. Assuming that CCB state statutes make it easier for institutions within these states to consider offering the degree—at least easier in terms of legal authority—one should expect an increase in the number of CCB degree-granting institutions in the upcoming years.

Previous research on CCB degree adoption has focused exclusively on degrees offered by public institutions, yet several two-year non-profit and two-year for-profit institutions, as well as a few tribal colleges, currently offer baccalaureate degrees. Table 1 offers detailed information on the 23 CCB states, including the years in which CCB policies were approved, the names of the bills (in the case of states with state statutes), and the number of institutions (two-year public, two-year private non-profit, two-year private for-profit, and tribal colleges) offering baccalaureate degrees.

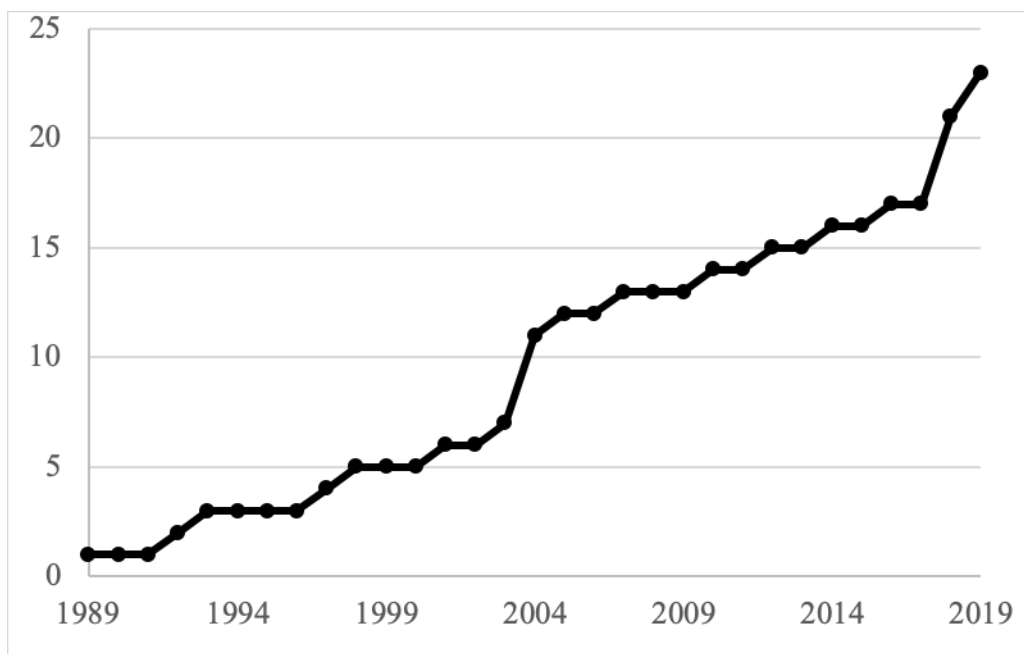


Figure 1. Total number of states with CCB policies between 1989 and 2019.

² According to Walker and Pendleton (2013), the Former Executive Director of the CCBA commented that such initiative was used to leverage the resources of other associations with CCBA to achieve common interests. Such associations and major conferences included the League for Innovation, National Council for Workforce Education, and the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, among others.

The sources of data used to construct the table include information from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), websites of coordinating boards in each CCB state, including the websites of state legislatures, state administrative agencies, and institutions, as well as research literature and media.

To provide a fuller understanding of the prevalence of higher education institutions classified as predominantly sub-baccalaureate level that now confer baccalaureate degrees, a list of baccalaureate degrees offered by tribal colleges, two-year private, and two-year public institutions is included in the overall count. For instance, although table 1 focuses on the 23 states conferring these degrees in the two-year public sector, such count does not reflect all states that allow conferral of baccalaureate degrees by two-year non-profit and two-year for-profit institutions among the 50 states. If we add states that have authorized two-year degree granting institutions that are private for-profit and private non-profit, the number of conferring states grows to 39 and 29, respectively.

Going back to table 1, four tribal colleges offer CCB degrees, which is 11.4% of the total of number of 35 tribal colleges reported by the American Association of Community Colleges (2019). In addition to public two-year institutions, in the 23 CCB states there are a total of 48 two-year private non-profit institutions that confer baccalaureate degrees (30% of all two-year non-profits), and 83 private for-profit institutions conferring baccalaureate degrees (10.4% of all two-year for-profit institutions in the nation).³ In relation to this point, Kramer, Ortagus, and Donovan (2017) have shown CCB degrees impact enrollment at four-year, for-profit institutions. Their study of CCB degrees in Florida revealed that enrollment in a region's four-year, for-profit sector decreased by 45% when a two-year public institution located nearby began offering CCB degrees. These results suggest that the adoption of CCB degrees may have a substitution effect when

community colleges enroll students who may have otherwise attended four-year, for-profit institutions. Given the potential lower cost of baccalaureate degree enrollment at community colleges, this substitution effect may be beneficial for students (Soler, Hansen, & Bragg, 2019).

FACTORS INFLUENCING STATE CCB POLICY ADOPTION

Numerous factors contribute to the proliferation of CCB policy adoption by states, including enhanced interest in improving associate-to-baccalaureate degree transfer policies and processes, increasing college completion rates, developing the workforce and providing opportunity for career advancement for working learners, offering more workforce-relevant instruction for working learners who are retraining or advancing in their chosen career paths, and aligning higher education with the changing labor market (Soler & Bragg, 2016). Moreover, Henderson (2014) found other factors influenced the adoption CCB degrees in 16 states, including regional diffusion, college tuition costs, median student income, enrollment growth at undergraduate institutions, educational attainment levels, labor force participation levels, board authority to approve the degrees, consolidated coordinating board structures, Republican-controlled legislatures, and professional legislatures.

State legislative processes also influence how and when CCBs are authorized. Some states have experimented with CCB pilots as a first step towards wider authorization in community colleges in the state (e.g., Florida and Washington), but other states such as California passed CCB legislation involving pilots that have not expanded beyond pilot programs after passing the initial state laws authorizing the pilot. At the same time, some states, such as Michigan, have passed legislation approving CCBs in specific fields or institutions without necessarily leading to wider authorization. To this point, both California and

³ According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), there were 2,791 for-profit colleges in 2017-18. Out of those, 499 were 4-year for-profit and 795 were 2-year for-profit institutions.

Michigan have made requests to their state legislatures to expand CCBs but these legislative proposals have not yet advanced (Bragg, 2019).

Ruud, Townsend, and Bragg (2010) observed that CCB policy adoption was closely linked to the state policy context and did not consistently follow a linear path. For instance, when examining the phenomenon of CCB degree policy in Washington and Florida using Kingdon's multiple streams theory, Ruud et al. found that low baccalaureate degree completion rates and workforce needs opened a window of opportunity for CCBs in Florida. In contrast, interest in enhancing transfer and providing greater geographic access to baccalaureate degrees was prioritized in arguments for adoption of CCB degrees in Washington, along with the need for more baccalaureate-prepared workers.

Although reasons for CCB degrees may positively impact policy adoption, concerns about these degrees can also make their expansion controversial (Ruud & Bragg, 2011). Factors explaining why adoption or expansion has not occurred in some states stem from concerns about mission shift, funding and capacity to undergo the accreditation, implementation, and scaling process, and program quality (Bragg & Love, 2019; Inside Higher Ed & Gallup, 2019). Also, opponents have argued conferring bachelor's degrees will force community colleges to increase tuition and fees for upper-level courses, ultimately raising costs for all students (Petrosian, 2017). Yet, there are examples of states such as Florida, where the average cost of a CCB degree is \$13,000, well below what students would pay at a public university (McCarthy, 2019).

Looking more deeply at state policy adoption from the standpoint of states that have not advanced legislation on the CCB, two states, Arizona and Illinois, may be informative. In states like Illinois, CCB conferral policies have been debated by the general assembly over a number of years but legislation has not passed. Mission creep, degree duplication, and lacking evidence of unmet need for bachelor's degrees were cited as reasons for non-passage (Nardulli, 2014). In Arizona, interest in CCB degrees led to the introduction of a bill in 2005 authorizing 10 community colleges to

offer degrees in teacher education, health care, law enforcement, and fire services, but the bill did not advance out of the Senate appropriations committee. The state's three universities opposed the bill, citing mission erosion, mission creep, and hidden costs that would lead to tuition and tax increases (Thor & Bustamante, 2013).

PATTERNS IN CCB POLICY ADOPTION

Apart from updating the current count of CCB states, this data note also examines patterns in CCB policy adoption to offer an even more nuanced picture of the CCB national landscape by examining differences in the scope of policies authorizing CCB degrees. In-depth examination of CCB policies adopted by states may also inform understanding of policy implementation and practice. Such information can also be used to describe connections between the type of state CCB policy and proliferation of CCB degree-adopting institutions and programs in each state.

State policy processes differ in the 23 conferring states, which influences how states approach CCB implementation. After reviewing state patterns of CCB policy adoption and implementation, we recommend distinguishing states according to the following two types:

Type A: All two-year degree-granting institutions are authorized by state statute or administrative rule to confer baccalaureate degree(s). Included in this category are states that authorize all of these institutions to confer baccalaureate degree(s) but limit authorization to specific degree types and/or programs of study.

Type B: Some but not all two-year degree-granting institutions are authorized by state statute or administrative rule to confer baccalaureate degree(s). Included in this category are states that authorize a single or sub-set of these institutions to confer baccalaureate degrees in specific degree types and/or programs of study.

In both types, authorization can occur either through state statute approved directly by the state or through

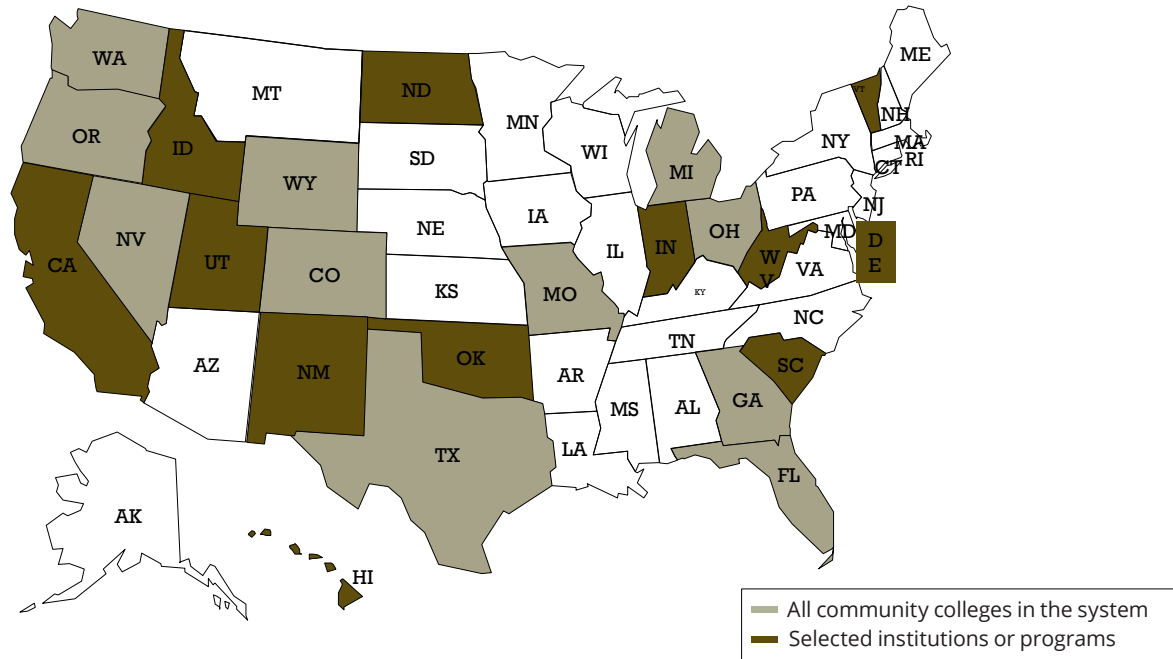


Figure 2. CCB states by implementation type as of July 2019.

administrative rules approved by specific coordinating or governing bodies in the state. In some cases, state statutes authorize the entire community college system to confer CCB degrees; however, state statutes can also apply to specific programs and institutions. For instance, whereas Florida passed a state statute to authorize all community colleges to offer CCB degrees in a variety of degree types and programs of study, CA's state statute limited authorization a pilot program involving up to 15 of the state's 128 community colleges.

In addition to differences in state policy approaches to authorize CCB degrees, the varied structures of higher education/community college systems and institutions play a role in degree authorization and implementation as well. For example, states vary in recognizing and treating branches of universities as community colleges, with some consistently authorizing branch colleges to confer associate and baccalaureate degrees and others changing the degree-granting authority of predominantly associate degree-granting branches to confer baccalaureates as part of larger system capacity changes. In these cases, states sometimes decline to

consider the reforms as fitting the CCB conferral. These types of situations have led to researchers reporting different numbers of CCB states (See for instance, Floyd & Skolnik, 2019; Fulton, 2015, 2018).

Building on the differences in CCB adoption described above, figure 2 presents a classification of states in which all community colleges can confer CCB degrees (Type A) versus states in which only a subset of institutions can do so (Type B).

Figure 2 shows 11 states that approved policies authorizing the entire community college system to confer CCB degrees (Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming). Although legislative groundwork has been laid for all institutions to confer CCB degrees, some of these states limit the programs that can confer baccalaureate degrees. For example, recent legislation in Colorado authorizes community colleges to confer baccalaureate degrees in nursing, and Michigan authorizes bachelor's degrees in energy production, concrete technology, maritime technology, and culinary arts. Also, states such as Missouri, Oregon,

and Wyoming that passed legislative statutes in 2018 and 2019 are still in the process of structuring CCB program approval and implementation, and they do not have institutions conferring baccalaureate degrees as of yet.

In contrast to CCB authorization in which all community colleges are authorized to confer baccalaureate degrees, 12 states authorized CCB degree conferral for specific institutions and sometimes also in certain programs (California, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and West Virginia). For instance, the only CCB degree authorized in South Carolina is at one institution that is authored to offer an applied baccalaureate degree in manufacturing. In states such as Vermont and Hawaii, only one institution is authorized through an administrative rule change. Only Maui College in Hawaii and Vermont Technical College in Vermont are authorized to confer the CCB degree. In Idaho, community colleges are limited to urban areas⁴ and baccalaureate degrees in the liberal arts and sciences, business, and education.

Regarding the 121 CCB institutions nationwide, 76% percent of these institutions exist in states in which CCB policies authorize all community colleges to confer CCB degrees,⁵ suggesting that this type of CCB approval may contribute to the expansion of CCB programs within states. This pattern appears to be especially true in states such as Washington and Florida in which 85% and 96% of the community and technical colleges are now offering CCB degrees, respectively.⁶

In terms of program approval by field of study, states tend to follow different approaches mostly based on their own analyses of workforce demands, general state needs, and efforts to avoid program

duplication. In states such as Michigan, South Carolina, and California, the offering of CCB degrees is restricted to pilots and/or specific fields of study. As already mentioned, although Michigan authorizes all community colleges to confer CCB degrees, the degrees can only be offered in energy production, concrete technology, maritime technology, and culinary arts. To date, only 6 of Michigan's 28 public community colleges confer one or more of these degrees. California approved 15 institutions to pilot CCBs in a variety of fields such as biomanufacturing, dental hygiene, health information management, and respiratory care. These states differ from Washington and Florida wherein new CCB degree programs must be connected to workforce demands demonstrated by each college, but are not limited to fields selected by the state.

THE ROLE OF CCB DEGREES IN ACCESS AND EQUITY

In discussions about the authorization of CCB degrees, many CCB bills and institutional policies emphasize the role that these degrees can play in efforts to improve college degree completion goals, potentially addressing access and equity concerns in higher education, and filling workforce gaps that impact economic development. Examples of these themes can be found in the 2005 and 2010 Washington legislation that strives to “increase baccalaureate access and encourage economic development”, and also mentions the state’s need “to meet both of the master plan’s goals and to provide adequate educational opportunities for Washington’s citizens”, and also stating that “additional access is needed to the baccalaureate” (p. 2). In the Florida legislation, CCB policy mentions the need “to maximize open access for students, respond to community needs for postsecondary academic

⁴ In the Legislature of the State of Idaho (2017), urban area districts are defined as taxing districts that meet some criteria: a.) market value for assessment purposes of taxable property of not less than 350 million dollars; and b.) a population above 90,000 in the county of the taxing district where the college is located.

⁵ There are 92 CCB institutions in Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming, which are the states that authorize all community colleges in the system to confer CCB degrees. Again, Michigan is included in this list because authorization.

⁶ In Washington, 29 out of 34 community and technical colleges are authorized to confer CCB degrees. In Florida, that number is 27 out of 28.

education and career degree education, and provide associate and baccalaureate degrees that will best meet the state's employment needs" (p. 2).

Emerging research suggests that CCB degrees may play an important role in terms of equity in higher education by better serving a racially and economically diverse student population. These students are usually adult learners who are working, often full-time, and who have considerable work experience that they do not want to abandon for full-time study toward the baccalaureate (Bragg, 2019; Bragg & Soler, 2017; McCarthy, 2019; Townsend, Bragg, & Ruud, 2008). For instance, Meza (2019) reports in a previous CCRI data note that CCB students are older than university students, averaging 32 years of age, and also more racially and economically diverse than university students. Moreover, Meza found CCB students are demographically similar to students in professional-technical education programs offered at the certificate and associate level. National research conducted on CCBs shows that students tend to have positive experiences and value the workforce relevance of the programs, as well as their flexible scheduling and affordable cost (Bragg & Soler, 2017).

Programs in Florida, Washington, and Texas have seen positive outcomes for their graduates. For instance, Vidal-Rodriguez (2019) focuses on 22 CCB states and finds that CCB degrees have a positive impact on undergraduate enrollment for all students in public four-year institutions. Also, Petrosian (2017) finds that 88% of students with an associate degree completed their bachelor's degree within three years at South Texas College. In Florida, Schneider and Columbus (2017) show that earnings of CCB graduates five years after graduation are almost the same as those of graduates from the state's public four-year institutions. Furthermore, a recent study by Frenette (2019) indicates that CCB degree holders in Canada earn 12% more per year, on average, than bachelor's degree graduates, but the study does not make specific comparisons between fields of study. Therefore, higher returns in CCBs in STEM could be inflating the results. Although the overall research on the outcomes of

CCB programs is still very limited, these studies show promising results on the potential impact that these degrees could have when operating at scale.

A recent survey of college leaders reveals that 80% of community college presidents believe that these institutions are in a strong position to offer CCB degrees to students who would otherwise not have access to baccalaureate degrees due to cost or location, and 75% agree that offering the degree can help close attainment gaps in baccalaureate completion (Inside Higher Ed and Gallup, 2019). These positive perceptions of community college leaders may give rise to more states considering joining the CCB trend, although less affirmative views held by university leaders may slow or stall advancement.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the number of CCB states and institutions has gradually increased over time, with 23 states and 121 institutions now offering CCB degrees. In these states, at least one community or technical college is authorized to offer baccalaureates by legislative statute or administrative rule, and differences in CCB policy adoption and implementation can be seen between states where all community colleges are authorized to confer CCB and states in which only a few institutions or programs can do so. As CCB degrees continue expanding, differences in policy design and policy implementation linked to demographics, workforce needs, higher education conditions, and political pushback, which are specific to each state, may continue to influence future adoption. More research is needed on CCB degree authorization to inform policy implementation, and our team of researchers at CCRI and CESNA continue to engage in this important work.

Table 1. The Status of Baccalaureate Degree Conferral by Institution Type in the 23 CCB States.

State	Year of Approval	Adoption Type	Policy document	Pilot	Two-Year Public	Tribal Colleges	Two-Year Private Non-Profit	Two-Year Private For-Profit
California	2014	Institutions/Programs	S.B. 850 (Cal. Educ. Code §78040)	Yes	15	0	6	28
Colorado	2010	State/System	3 bills: S.B. 101 (Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. §23-71-133) - S.B. 4 (Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. §23-1-133) - HB19-1086	No	4	0	2	2
Delaware	2016	Institutions/Programs	Historical documents	No	1	0	0	0
Florida	2001	State/System	S.B. 1162 (Fla. Stat. Ann. §1007.33) - S.B. 1716	Yes	27	0	9	14
Georgia	1997	State/System	Board of Regents Policy Manual	No	9	0	1	0
Hawaii	2007	Institutions/Programs	Historical documents	No	1	0	1	0
Idaho	2018	Institutions/Programs	Idaho Code 33-2107A	No	1	0	2	0
Indiana	2004*	Institutions/Programs	Historical documents	No	1	0	1	2
Michigan	2012	State/System	H.B. 4496 (Mich. Comp. Laws §389.121)	No	6	0	1	0
Missouri	2018	State/System	H.B. 744	No	0	0	3	5
North Dakota	2004	Institutions/Programs	Historical documents	No	1	2	2	1
New Mexico	2004	Institutions/Programs	Historical documents	No	1	1	0	1
Nevada	1998*	State/System	Master Plan-University and Community State Statute of Nevada	No	3	0	0	0
Ohio	2018	State/System	Section 3333.051 of the Ohio Revised Code. H.B. 49 of the 132nd General Assembly	No	9	0	8	6
Oklahoma	2004*	Institutions/Programs	Historical documents	No	2	0	0	2
Oregon	2019	State/System	HB2973 - S.B. 3	No	0	0	1	2
South Carolina	2018	Institutions/Programs	Bill 4931. 122nd Session 2017-2018	No	1	0	1	0
Texas	2003	State/System	Texas Legislature (78th Legislative Session): Pilot in 2003, 80th Legislative Session: pilot status removed, S.B. 2118 wide-state authorization	Yes	5	0	6	12
Utah	1992*	Institutions/Programs	Report	No	3	0	3	6
Vermont	1993	Institutions/Programs	Historical documents	No	1	0	1	1
Washington	2005	State/System	H.B. 1794 (2005) S.B. 6355 (2010), RCW 28B.50.810 (2012)	Yes	29	0	0	1
West Virginia	1989*	Institutions/Programs	Historical documents	No	1	1	0	0
Wyoming	2019	State/System	Act 80	No	0	0	0	0
Total					121	4	48	83

Notes: 1) Dates marked with * were cited by Fulton (2018). 2) Historical documents include institution websites, online announcements, newspapers, and blog posts through which institutions discuss the types of degrees offered or announce new CCB programs.

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The Community College Research Initiatives (CCRI) group at the University of Washington is partnering with New America's Center on Education and Skills (CESNA) to study AB and CCB degrees nationally.

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