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National award recognizes WCC as a leader in student success initiative

\$100,000 Gates Foundation grant supports technology that streamlines academic planning
and advances student success rates

BELLINGHAM, Wash. – Whatcom Community College has received national recognition for its successful leadership of a project that leverages technology to help students achieve their academic and career goals. The College's innovations were recognized with the Progress and Succeed Award at the Hobsons University national conference July 21-24 in Nashville, Tenn. The honor recognizes the WCC team's expert management and significant improvements of online student advising and support tools offered by Hobsons, an education software company.

"This award recognizes Whatcom's national leadership in integrating technology with the direct personal advising so crucial to student success," says Tim Douglas, chair of WCC's Board of Trustees. "Students have to balance work, finances, personal lives and the academic challenges of college. Our online tools make it much easier for students to plan a career path and connect with resources they need. This award shows why WCC is a great choice for students who want to get ahead."

The Hobsons software—called AgileGrad and Retain—replaces manual processes and integrates degree planning, advising, and scheduling to streamline preparations for students who are completing associates degrees, transferring to bachelor's degree programs, or pursuing career advancement. Students and advisors will develop individual educational plans online and then be able to visually monitor progress toward completion. Other features include customizable student emails, an online student information portal, and early alert functions that notify students of issues that could slow their progression such as poor class attendance and low grades early in the term.

"The technology revolutionizes advisor-student relationships," says WCC President Kathi Hiyane-Brown. "Students will have access to educational planning tools to be more self-reliant. Advisors will be able to place needed focus on risk intervention, career advising and coaching. It's a wonderful example of Whatcom's dedication to student success."

State budget cuts have significantly limited technology enhancements for educational planning, advising and coaching, risk targeting and intervention. Whatcom began the initial roll-out of Hobsons' degree planning software in spring 2013 as part of a \$100,000 grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The College was one of 19 schools nationwide

selected to participate in the grant program, which is intended to accelerate the development of student planning and advising software.

According to the Progress and Succeed Award nomination, the Whatcom team was highly motivated and focused throughout the entire implementation and carefully configured their system to maximize students' success by using degree planning, advising, early alerts, and other functions—many of which were improved by suggestions from the WCC team. The software system has been successfully introduced to staff members and more than 1,000 students, who now have active degree plans they can monitor online to view their progress toward degree completion.

Dave Knapp, associate director of advising and career services, accepted the award on behalf of the WCC Hobsons team and presented a conference break-out session, “Effective Use of the AgileGrad Advising Solution.” More than 1,000 people representing approximately 300 colleges attended the national conference.

About Whatcom: Whatcom Community College is an accredited, comprehensive two-year college with an accomplished faculty and staff who serve 11,000 students annually. On its campus in Bellingham, Wash., and through online courses, Whatcom offers transfer degrees, professional and technical training programs, as well as basic education, job skills, and Community & Continuing Education classes. For more information, visit www.whatcom.ctc.edu.

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