

Press Release

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More people to have the opportunity for a 4-year computer science degree thanks to Amazon investments in new Bachelor of Science programs at Washington's community and technical colleges

Grants build on state legislature's 2021 approval of new B.S. in Computer Science programs; students from backgrounds under-represented in tech are a special focus

Press contacts:



Amazon Glenn Kuper Senior Manager, Policy Communications glekuper@amazon.com 206/713.9557	Seattle Colleges Michael Beneke Director of Communications Seattle Colleges Foundation michael.beneke@seattlecolleges.edu 206/250-4993 (mobile)	State Board of Community and Technical Colleges Laura McDowell Director of Communications lmcdowell@sbctc.edu 360/704-4310 360/280-0670 (mobile)	Washington State Opportunity Scholarship Jessica Monger External Affairs Director jmonger@waopportunitiescholarship.org 360/901-9762
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SEATTLE, December 13, 2021 | Today Amazon announced three interrelated grants to support start-up of new Bachelor of Science in Computer Science programs at community and technical colleges in Seattle and across Washington. The grants — each a million dollars — go to **Seattle Colleges Foundation**, the **Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges**, and the **Washington State Opportunity Scholarship** program.

“Amazon knows how science and technology can change the world and believes in the power of computer science to unleash creativity and unlock human potential,” said **Victor Reinoso**, Global Director, Amazon Future Engineer. “Amazon also knows that talent and passion are spread across all young people, but opportunity is not. It’s critical that we increase opportunity for all students to pursue computer science and STEM education. Young people are the engineers of the future, with the possibility to build a better world for themselves and for us all.”

Amazon’s investments follow the approval earlier this year of legislation that empowers community and technical colleges around the state to begin Bachelor of Science in Computer Science programs, approval that had earlier been limited to just a single Washington community college.

The legislation, SB 5401, whose prime sponsor was **Sen. Joe Nguyen** (D-West Seattle), observed that Washington imports four times as many computer science grads as it generates, and noted that:

The technology sector in Washington currently has more than 24,000 job openings, most of which require a four-year Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science. [Yet only] 1,883 computer science degrees were awarded in Washington during the 2018-19 school year, and [of these] only 3.8% were awarded to African American students, 5.6% to Hispanic students, and less than 1% to Native Americans... We need to expand access to the high-demand field of computer science, especially to students of color.

After passing 48-0 in the state Senate, and 96-2 in the House, the bill became law on July 25, 2021. Colleges that develop approved programs are eligible to begin instruction in Fall, 2022.

Amazon’s gifts will support the following efforts:

- **SEATTLE COLLEGES FOUNDATION.** *Start-up of a collaborative baccalaureate among Seattle Central, South Seattle, and North Seattle Colleges.* The schools already have robust associate's-level computer science offerings, and will further enhance them, adding upper division courses hosted at North Seattle College and online, with a planned start in Fall 2022.

"We all know that, in our region, there is a huge gap between the supply and demand for college graduates in STEM fields, particularly in computer science," says **Dr. Shouan Pan**, Chancellor of Seattle Colleges. "Community colleges have played and will continue to play an instrumental role in supporting workforce development in communities across the state. I am pleased that Seattle Colleges is leading the way in offering this new bachelor's degree in computer science, with specific focus on attracting and training students of color for tech-sector jobs."

The Colleges' new bachelor's will, in large part, draw on a growing pipeline of diverse students who are flourishing in STEM at Seattle Public Schools (SPS). Today many SPS grads enroll in the Colleges' **Seattle Promise** program, which offers two years of free tuition plus key support services. For some, the addition of a new community college-based B.S. in Computer Science will make higher education feel even more appealing and attainable.

In a recent survey of lower-level computer science students at the Seattle Colleges, respondents indicated high satisfaction with their associate's-level instruction, and 87% expressed interest in enrolling in the new B.S. program.

- **WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES (SBCTC).** *Coordinating work among community and technical colleges elsewhere in Washington with an interest in starting a B.S. in Computer Science program.* Amazon is providing \$1 million to the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to help launch computer science degrees at community and technical colleges across Washington state.

The investments will support colleges as they develop shared curricula and form regional partnerships that prepare students for well-paying careers in high-tech fields.

The State Board will distribute the funds to colleges in the form of grants, with a focus on serving students who have been historically denied opportunities and access to computer science bachelor's degrees, including low-income families, students of color, and students who are the first in their families to go to college. About 278,000 students attend Washington's 34 community and technical colleges each year, nearly half of whom are students of color.

"No matter where you are in the state, if you know how to design and engineer software, there are great opportunities in front of you," remarked **Jay Reich**, chairman of the State Board. "We're excited to help community and technical colleges across Washington develop computer science bachelor's programs so people of all ages and backgrounds can make that a reality. We're immensely grateful to Amazon for the generous investment in this work and our students."

- **WASHINGTON STATE OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP (WSOS).** *Financial support of students pursuing STEM-related bachelor's degrees at Washington's colleges and universities.* Amazon's \$1 million investment in the Washington State Opportunity Scholarship (WSOS) program will support students pursuing a bachelor's degree in high-demand STEM and health care fields.

WSOS is a public-private partnership where every dollar received is matched dollar-for-dollar by the state of Washington. Selected students receive flexible financial aid that can be used to cover tuition as well as expenses like housing and transportation. Opportunity Scholars also

receive a continuum of support services including peer and industry mentorship that ensures recipients can persist in their studies and launch a high-demand career in Washington state.

“Amazon’s generous investment in WSOS will enable us to continue serving Washington students pursuing bachelor’s degrees in high-demand fields, creating pathways to strong, living wages,” said **Kimber Connors**, executive director of the Washington State Opportunity Scholarship. “Their support for the state’s new expansion to offer computer science education through the community college system will open more doors for our diverse Opportunity Scholar community while ensuring one of the state’s strongest and most profitable sectors will have the talent it needs to grow and thrive.”

OTHER QUOTES

Mayor Jenny Durkan

“Together with our partners, Seattle is leading the way to give our students free college through Seattle Promise, scholarships, and access to the jobs of the future. This new computer science degree is yet another way that students can get the degree they want, start their career, and become a part of Seattle’s growing workforce.”

Mayor-Elect Bruce Harrell

“This exciting learning initiative and generous investment shows how we can come together to keep Seattle moving forward — a city that doesn’t just attract the best and brightest, but also nurtures homegrown talent, giving every youth and every student the support and opportunity needed to succeed and thrive. In tandem with Seattle Promise, this program will help ensure that the youth of our city — no matter their background or neighborhood — can and will be part of the next generation of innovative, forward-thinking technology leaders.”

State Senator Joe Nguyen

“Talent is universal but opportunity is not. In order for our communities to thrive we need to invest in the most important asset this region has to offer, the people of Washington state. Partnerships, like this one with Amazon, are a great example of how we can work together and continue to build a robust economy while ensuring everyone has access to quality jobs.”

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About Seattle Colleges and the Seattle Colleges Foundation

Seattle Colleges is Washington state’s largest college district, with more than 41,000 students enrolled each year. It is composed of Seattle Central College, North Seattle College, South Seattle College, and five specialty centers. Seattle Colleges offers more than 130 workforce education and training programs that lead to bachelor’s degrees in high-growth industries, associate degrees in diverse disciplines, certificates in professional-technical programs, and transfer degrees to universities throughout the United States. **Seattle Colleges Foundation** mobilizes community support for the mission, work and impact of Seattle Colleges. The Foundation’s *Equity Can’t Wait* campaign helps students at the Colleges — particularly students historically underserved by higher education — to dream big, be supported, and fully realize their unbounded potential. More at equitycampaign.info.

About The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC)

SBCTC is led by a governor-appointed board and provides leadership, advocacy, and coordination for Washington’s system of 34 public community and technical colleges. Each year, about 278,000 students train for the workforce, prepare to transfer to a university, gain basic math and English skills, or pursue continuing education.

About WSOS

Created by the Washington state Legislature in 2011, the Washington State Opportunity Scholarship helps low- and middle-income Washington students earn degrees, certificates or apprenticeships in high-demand trade, health care or STEM fields and launch careers in Washington state.