State Board of Education approves two 'first-of-a-kind' CEI bachelor’s programs

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College of Eastern Idaho will offer two Bachelor of Applied Science degrees in digital forensics and analytics and operations management starting in the fall 2025.

The State Board of Education discussed the college’s proposal at length during its Wednesday meeting before granting authorization.
“It’s unusual in Idaho for community colleges to offer a four-year degree,” College of Eastern Idaho President Rick Aman said. “We’ve been working on an applied baccalaureate for two years.” Aman said no other universities in the state offer these programs.

“We really feel like it’s the wave of education. … It’s certainly on the cutting edge of what’s happening in Idaho,” CEI’s Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs Lori Barber said.

Prior to Wednesday, only the College of Southern Idaho had an approved baccalaureate program.

“No other community college has two (approved four-year programs),” Barber said. “We’re the first to get two through, and that was (Wednesday) with the State Board of Education.”

Community colleges in 26 states offer four-year programs, but the concept is new to Idaho, Aman said.

After two hours of discussion, the State Board of Education unanimously approved the digital forensics and analytics program and passed the operations management proposal on a 5-3 vote. State Superintendent Debbie Critchfield, Cindy Siddoway, Cally Roach, Shawn Keough and Kurt Liebich voted in favor and Board President Linda Clark, Bill Gilbert and David Hill opposed the program. The board also approved a business administration bachelor’s degree at College of Western Idaho.

Board members extensively debated the merits of expanding four-year programs at community colleges and the potential impact to existing programs at Idaho’s universities.

At CEI, the courses are designed for working professionals and will be held in the evenings on campus.
“There is definitely a cybersecurity shortage. Workforce needs have been highlighted and emphasized in the governor’s cybersecurity task force last year, so we think there’s (significant) jobs,” CEI Cybersecurity and Technology Department Chairman Josh Duersch said to the state board. “… This program aims to provide an upper division pathway for an associate of applied science graduate into advanced knowledge in digital forensics and analytics and the related concepts.”

The operations management program is designed for working professionals, such as a welder, who is preparing to transfer into management — introducing learners to accounting, leadership, human resources and supply-chain management, Barber said.

“A great example would be working at the lab in radiation safety, and you’re doing that as a technician, but can’t move into supervision until you have a bachelor’s,” Aman said. “This is an affordable and fast way to get that bachelor’s.”

Industry partners including local hospitals, Idaho National Laboratory and Elevation Labs are excited about the new degree programs, according to Aman and Barber.

About 50% of CEI students are nontraditional, Duersch said, some of whom are employed full-time, may be older, might have a GED or are returning to gain new skills.

“Our students want to stay here,” Barber said. “They don’t want to travel. They don’t really want to take online. … They want the real classroom experience.”

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