



UTAH SYSTEM OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION

# MEMORANDUM

December 1, 2023

## Program Alignment

Currently, technical education programs and course names, lengths, and objectives in the same occupational areas, including regulated programs, differ between institutions.

There was concern among stakeholders that these differences cause confusion for students, employers, and educational partners seeking to identify and compare program requirements, associated costs, and time to completion. There was additional concern that these differences burden degree-granting institutions desiring to develop and maintain articulation agreements broadly across all technical education institutions, which may reduce the reach of such agreements, and this may cause students to unnecessarily duplicate coursework, incurring additional costs and time to completion.

In 2022, the statute was changed to require the Utah Board of Higher Education to align technical education programs and courses offered throughout the state with common names, descriptions, lengths, and objectives. With the intent to provide institutions with flexibility to meet regional industry demand, statute allows for the customization of electives.

To comply with statute, the Board's strategic plan includes a tactic to facilitate coordination among technical education programs to align program structure and course content for consistent programming in broad occupational areas. This initiative also supports another strategy to develop stackable credentials that streamline student transfer among institutions, reducing the duplication of coursework already completed. The intent is to expedite time to completion and reduce tuition costs.

Technical education programs have broad alignment across institutions, particularly those regulated through licensure or programmatic accreditations, which comprise about half of the programs offered. Courses in numerous additional programs have strong alignment through industry certifications, which draw curriculum together in preparing students for examinations.

## **Board Expectations**

The former Board defined the following expectations for the work:

- The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education will coordinate and provide guidance and assistance on the alignment initiative.
- The Office of the Commissioner will convene Faculty Program Committees with one faculty member representing each institution that offers the program.
- The alignment initiative follows program and course guidelines, including:
  - Required participation of Utah System of Higher Education institutions that offer technical education programs.
  - A core of required courses representing the broad foundational knowledge and skills comprised of at least 70% of the total program length would constitute alignment.
  - The option for up to 30% of the total program length may be comprised of non-aligned elective courses that represent unique regional employment needs, and these can be modified at any time during the year.
  - Alignment of program and course title, length, CIP code, description, and objectives.
  - Exceptions can be granted with appropriate justification.
- Faculty Program Committees will meet annually to evaluate whether changes should be made to the program. Faculty members are encouraged to engage with occupational advisory committees, degree-granting partner institutions, and other interested institutional personnel in developing these proposals.
- Institutions are expected to implement aligned programs within two years unless reasonable exceptions are granted by the Board of Higher Education.

## **Current Status**

- Anticipated alignment proposals: 99
- Proposals accepted by the Board as meeting the intent of the initiative: 71
- Appropriate exceptions granted by the Board: 9
- Proposals in progress: 18
- Proposals holding for policy definition of short-term training: 10
- Faculty Program Committee members: 250

***Publication of Aligned Programs:*** A web page will be developed to include a list and links to aligned program and course information (in progress).

***System-level articulation for secondary students:*** In FY24, Faculty Program Committees that have achieved alignment were asked to evaluate Utah State Board of Education technical education strands and standards for technical education to develop a statewide articulation agreement. Agreements will define credit for prior learning to award credit for secondary coursework already completed, reducing duplication of completed coursework and time to completion (in progress for programs that have achieved alignment).

***Representation of Faculty Program Committee Chairs on USBE Strands and Standards Committee:*** The objective is to better align secondary and technical education coursework to support the seamless transition of students between educational institutions (in discussion).

***Broadening Articulation Agreements with Degree-Granting Institutions:*** As degree-granting institutions develop and renew articulation agreements, technical education institutions may request agreements be broadened to the system level to accommodate the needs and interests of any technical education student in the state who may participate in an educational pathway opportunity, regardless of institution (beginning stages).

### **Process**

- Every program area has a Faculty Program Committee comprising one faculty member from each institution that offers the program. Committees propose a program title, length, description, objectives, and course titles, lengths, descriptions, and objectives.
- The Office of the Commissioner compiles and submits Program Committee proposals and modifications of proposals to Instructional Officers for review and recommendations. Recommended changes are reviewed and accepted by the faculty.
- The USHE Curriculum Review Committee reviews each proposal to verify it meets the intent of the initiative. The committee is made up of the Commissioner of Higher Education and his staff, including the chief economist, associate commissioner of technical education, and the assistant commissioner of technical education, as well as a representation of two technical education institution presidents and instructional officers.
- Proposals are submitted to the Board as an action item on the consent calendar. Approval of this item signifies the Board accepts the documentation as meeting the directives and intent of the initiative.
- USHE policy defined program approval and modification requirements.

### **Commissioner's Recommendation**

This is an information item only; no action is required. The Commissioner recommends staff work with the designated Board member, instructional officers, and presidents to make any revisions to Board-defined expectations and consider developing policy to support the initiative.