

*Revised July 2025*

# Program and Course Alignment Guidelines

## Introduction

These guidelines provide a consistent framework for developing, revising, and aligning technical education programs and courses across the Utah System of Higher Education’s technical colleges. They are designed to help faculty and instructional leaders create high-quality, workforce-focused programs that meet accreditation standards, address employer needs, and reflect statewide priorities.

The guidelines are required for all technical education programs as defined in [Board Policy R404](#). They apply to new program development, updates to existing programs or courses, and the ongoing review and maintenance of aligned offerings. While the structure is standardized, institutions retain flexibility within the systemwide framework.

## Definitions

- **Aligned Program:** A technical education program with a common name, CIP code, description, and objectives. Includes foundational courses with common course prefixes, numbers, names, lengths, descriptions, and objectives.
- **Course:** Instruction in a specific subject area, defined by a course number, title, clock hours, credit hours, description, and objectives.
- **Core Courses / Foundational Courses:** Mandatory courses that make up the majority of the program. These represent the minimum educational requirements for employment or licensure. Required in all institutions offering the aligned program.
- **Supplemental Courses:** Institution-added courses that address unique regional industry needs. Must count toward graduation. May be required or elective.
- **Non-Required Elective Courses:** Optional, non-credit courses that do not count toward graduation. May be offered through continuing occupational education, but cannot carry credit or use the “TEXX” prefix.
- **Emphasis:** A structured specialization within a program that develops specific skills and extends the program beyond the foundational core.
- **System Training Plan:** The shared, system-approved structure for aligned programs and courses.
- **Substantive Change:** A change to an aligned program’s title, CIP code, scope (description/objectives), or a  $\pm 25\%$  change in program length. Also includes changes to the criteria defined by an accrediting body.

- **Regulated Program:** A technical education program defined by an external entity (e.g., licensing board, accreditor) that specifies content, competencies, or length.

### **Program Structure and Modification**

- **Graduation Requirements:** Institutions must offer sufficient foundational and supplemental coursework for students to meet the graduation requirements outlined in the System Training Plan.
- **Electives:**
  - Students choose from a list of electives to fulfill program graduation requirements. These may not exceed 30% of the total program length.
- **Program Length:**
  - Total program length must remain fixed, regardless of electives or emphases.
  - Preferred program lengths: 150, 300, 600, 900, 1200, 1500, or 1800 hours.
  - Programs 600+ hours (or 16+ credit hours) may be eligible for financial aid.
  - Programs of 900+ hours may qualify for inclusion in certain articulation agreements (e.g., General Technology AAS).
- **Program Changes:**
  - May occur once annually, with an effective date of July 1.
  - Substantive changes must be approved by CIOs, the USHE Review Committee, and the Utah Board of Higher Education.
- **Admissions Requirements**
  - Institutions define program admission requirements, which should be minimal and limited to what is necessary for student success.
- **Accreditation and Partnerships:**
  - Programs must meet institutional and programmatic accreditation requirements.
  - Institutions must coordinate with educational partners when making changes affecting shared or transfer programs.

### **Course Structure and Modifications**

- **Minimum Lengths:**
  - 30 hours for lecture/lab
  - 45 hours for work-based learning
- **Maximum Lengths:**
  - 120 hours for lecture/lab (longer courses should be split)
- **Standard Increments:**
  - 30-hour blocks for lecture/lab
  - 45-hour blocks for work-based learning

- **Each course must include:**
  - A descriptive title
  - Clock hours and credit hours
  - A course description and objectives
  - Clearly defined instructional content and learning outcomes
- **A new course must be created if:**
  - Clock or credit hours are changed
  - Substantive changes are made to content or learning outcomes
  - The course no longer reflects what prior students were taught
- **Prerequisites:** Institutions determine prerequisites, which should be used sparingly and only when essential for student success.
- **Course Sequencing:** Institutions also determine course sequencing based on instructional flow and program structure.
- **Shared courses** used across multiple programs must involve collaboration among impacted institutions, programs, and faculty before modifications are made.
- **Accreditation Note:** Do not refer to individual courses as “programs.” Programs represent structured groupings of coursework aligned to broad occupational areas and require separate approval by the Board and accrediting bodies.

#### **Program and Course Title Requirements:**

- Program titles must reflect the broad occupational area of study.
- Course titles must clearly describe the course content and be easily understood at a glance.
- Titles must be simple, descriptive, and used consistently across all platforms (e.g., catalog, website, Student Information System, and marketing materials).
- Acronyms may be included only when paired with the full name (e.g., “Microsoft Word (MS Word)”).
- Leveled courses should use Roman numerals (e.g., Welding I, Welding II).
- Naming conventions must be consistent across institutions.
- Work-based learning courses (e.g., externships, clinical experiences) must stand alone and may not be combined with lecture or lab instruction.

#### **Program and Course Descriptions**

Program descriptions should:

- Be 100–150 words (4–6 sentences), written in an active, present-tense voice using plain language (e.g., “students learn,” not “students will learn”).
- Tone should be professional but accessible for prospective students, parents, advisors, or transfer partners, with varying levels of prior knowledge.

- Use descriptive words that provide context and reflect the program or course value.
- Set the stage, don't restate bulleted objectives.
- Connect courses with program-level descriptions and objectives.
- Be publication-ready for prospective students and partners.
- May include a brief statement on preparation for licensure or certification applicable at all institutions, and accreditation language as required by the accrediting body.

Program descriptions should exclude:

- Admission requirements or prerequisites.
- Job titles or occupational lists.
- Required materials or textbooks.
- Abbreviations, acronyms, or jargon.

### **Program and Course Objectives**

- Each program and course description must also include 5–8 broad and measurable program objectives in bullet format.
- Should begin with what the student will do, not what the instructor will teach.
- Each objective should represent a distinct skill or outcome.
- Should connect with program-level descriptions and objectives.
- Should be clear and specific, not vague.
- Start each objective with a strong action verb (see examples below).
- Follow with the skill, knowledge, or competency to be demonstrated.
- Add context or conditions if helpful (e.g., “using industry-standard equipment”).

### **Examples:**

- Operate CNC machinery to fabricate precision parts within specified tolerances.
- Interpret medical terminology related to common pathologies.
- Demonstrate safe practices while performing electrical wiring tasks.
- Apply critical thinking to diagnose faults in HVAC systems.
- Communicate effectively with clients in a clinical setting.

### **Avoid the Following:**

<b>Weak Practice</b>	<b>Better Alternative</b>
Learn or understand	Explain, describe, identify
Know the steps of...	Demonstrate the ability to perform steps
Gain appreciation for...	Analyze, evaluate, compare
Be familiar with...	Apply, construct, solve
Vague terms (e.g., “effectively”)	Be specific about how effectiveness is measured

### **Action Verbs by Domain (Bloom's Taxonomy)**

- **Cognitive (Knowledge and Thinking Skills):** Define, describe, compare, analyze, evaluate, calculate, solve, apply, design
- **Psychomotor (Hands-on and Technical Skills):** Assemble, build, calibrate, measure, operate, fabricate, install, troubleshoot, repair, weld
- **Affective (Professional and Interpersonal Skills):** Demonstrate, adhere, value, communicate, collaborate, respect, exhibit, respond

### **Course Numbering (Informational)**

- The Commissioner's office assigns course numbers; however, faculty may provide recommendations during program development or revision.
- Use a program-specific prefix (e.g., WELD, MEDA).
- Courses that appear in multiple programs should carry the prefix of the program responsible for curriculum oversight.
- Use "MATH" only for general education math courses.
- All technical education courses must use four-digit numbering within the following ranges:
  - **1000–1999:** Courses within the first 900 hours of instruction
  - **2000–2999:** Courses beyond 900 hours
- Courses may not be numbered below 1000 or above 2999.
- Leveled courses should follow a sequential pattern (e.g., Keyboarding I = 1100, II = 1110, III = 1120).
- Work-based learning courses should be numbered near the end of the sequence (e.g., ITEC 1900 or 2900).
- Use **1900 or 2900** for externship or clinical experience courses.
- Use **1800-level** (for 600-hour programs) and **2800-level** (for 900+ hour programs) for special projects, capstones, or application-based courses.
- Whenever possible, group similar or related courses within the same number series for consistency (e.g., 1100, 1110, 1120 for progressively leveled content).