



UTAH SYSTEM OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION

# MEMORANDUM

TAB D

June 18, 2021

## Program and Course Alignment Initiative

In 2019, the Utah Higher Education Strategic Planning Commission provided the following information and guidance relating to collaboration, efficiency, and alignment for the Utah System of Higher Education:

- Principles included in ensuring capable statewide coordination focused on aligning investments with the public's needs.
- Study included observation of some bright spots around collaborative activity, most often across system boundaries, but mostly institutions operating independently.
- Recommendations included the development of a process and adoption of program and course competencies as the basis for all sub-baccalaureate awards, leaving implementation of those competencies to institutions.

The [Utah Board of Higher Education's strategic plan](#) includes a strategy for the completion priority to, "Structure awards to facilitate completion and transfer." This strategy includes a tactic to, "Facilitate coordination among programs to align program structure to facilitate completion and transfer, as possible."

### **Commissioner's Recommendation:**

This is an information item only; no action is required.

### **Attachment**

# Program and Course Alignment Initiative

## **Purpose**

Foundational industry practices across the state for entry-level employment generally align. Aligning programs and courses across institutions provides efficiency by sharing instruction and enabling faculty to collaborate on best practices for the creative delivery of instruction, development of engaging labs, and providing mentoring and supportive instruction to students in the classroom.

When industry hires a technical education graduate, they should be able to depend on the consistency and quality of that employee regardless of the institution attended.

Students who have explored technical education programs throughout Utah should have a reasonable expectation that they will receive the same quality of training regardless of the institution they attend.

Most faculty no longer work in industry, which can cause a lag in their skillset with current industry practices. While faculty participate in professional development and Occupational Advisory Committees provide feedback and guidance on program alignment with current industry practices, faculty also benefit from connecting with their peers to 1) share changes in industry; 2) teach each other; 3) share strategies regarding industry relations, program partnerships, development of work-based activities, and student follow-up; 4) share ideas regarding program compliance with third-party regulatory requirements; and 5) share material resources.

While technical education students do not typically move between institutions, some do. With interest in removing barriers to program access and completion, we want students to receive credit for course work completed at another institution. While this may be an informal practice, alignment helps ensure that students do not have to retake and repay for course work already completed.

Degree-granting institutions can develop broad program and course-level articulation agreements for all technical college students who progress educationally, reducing duplication of required course work and saving time and money.

## **Benefits Summary**

- Efficiency is realized when faculty in the same industries across all institutions do not have to reinvent the wheel.
- Alignment enhances the ability of institutions to readily share curriculum, learning resources, labs, and assessments.
- Sharing and collaborating on curriculum development will improve quality.
- Sharing resources allows faculty to spend more time engaging and supporting student success and investing efforts in industry relationships.
- Aligned programs and courses will result in broader transfer opportunities to degree-granting institutions. A single agreement can be represented for students from multiple institutions.
- Aligned programs and courses will assist and result in employers and industry representatives across the state to better understand the educational opportunities and outcomes of technical education.

## **Associated Information**

Technical college programs are intended to provide students with the broad knowledge and foundational skills needed for entry-level employment in each industry.

Of the unique programs offered, about half must be compliant with or meet the requirements of a regulatory body, such as a third-party accreditor or licensing agency.

Each approved program has an Occupational Advisory Committee made up of a minimum of three members external to the institution who have expertise in the program area. Committees meet at least twice annually to review the program and ensure the instruction aligns with industry demand.

Many technical education faculty members have formal education. All technical education faculty have significant industry experience in their field of instruction. Faculty participate in professional development activities to remain current in industry practices, are responsible for building and maintaining relationships with industry partners, and adjust their programs and courses to align with industry practices.

Faculty are responsible for developing curriculum, learning and laboratory activities, and assessments.

## **Expectations**

The system office will coordinate and provide guidance and assistance on the alignment initiative. Institutions must implement aligned programs within two years unless reasonable exceptions are granted by the Board of Higher Education Technical Education Committee.

The alignment initiative will follow program and course guidelines, including:

- required participation of USHE institutions that offer technical education programs
- alignment of program title, length in clock-hours, description, and objectives
- alignment of course numbers, titles, length in clock-hours, descriptions, and objectives
- a core representing foundational course work comprised of at least 50% of the total program length
- potential broad selection of elective courses representing regional employment needs

### **Program Committees**

Program committees will be made up of only one full-time faculty subject matter expert per program, per technical education institution in which the program is offered.

- Faculty are encouraged to send a faculty substitute if they are unable to attend a meeting.
- In cases where full-time faculty are not available, a program director may represent the program.
- Effort should be made to accommodate the schedules of as many attendees as possible.
- Committees should meet as often as needed to achieve the timeline goals identified below and at least once per year after alignment is achieved.
- While video conferencing is possible and acceptable, workgroup members are encouraged to maximize engagement and understanding of program and course content.
- Time-off and budget required to host, travel to, and/or participate in workgroup meetings must be approved by the supervisor and come from the college budget.
- A simple majority of participating institutions constitute agreement
- Data will be used to inform decisions and changes to programs and courses.
- Every institution is required to implement agreed-upon courses and programs.
- Institutions may request the Board's Technical Education Committee grant a waiver of alignment requirements with justification. The committee may approve variations of alignment.
- Upon completion, programs and course descriptions will be reported to the Board's Technical Education Committee.
- Program approval at a given college and modification requirements will be defined in Board policy.

### **Timeline**

**FY22:** Align program titles, lengths in clock-hours, descriptions, and objectives. Align core course numbers, titles, lengths in clock-hours, descriptions, and objectives. Encourage alignment of electives. Update program approval and modification.

**FY23:** Complete implementation of FY22 alignment activities. Align electives.

**FY24:** Complete the implementation of FY23 alignment activities.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**A program is “different/unique” and cannot be aligned. Does an institution have to participate?** Is the program really unique? Do the broad foundational knowledge and skills for the industry vary so greatly that if a student completes the program and moves to another area of the state, they will be unqualified for employment? Will graduates from a program offered in another region of the state be unable to get a job if they move to your region?

**What if my program *really* can’t align?** If the answers to the last section indicate that a program is truly unique, it is likely a different program. The institution can develop a new program or the Board’s Technical Education Committee can grant waivers to alignment with appropriate justification.

**Having to align course changes between all of technical education will make us less responsive to industry. How do we address this?** Continuing Occupational Education allows institutions to make program changes once per year. Most industries we serve don’t turn on a dime. Entry-level knowledge, skills, and attitudes do not change due to location or timing. There is reasonable time to make most adjustments. If electives are included in a program, institutions can add electives mid-year to meet immediate industry need. Continuing Occupational Education can also be used for urgent employer requests for training.

**Doesn’t this diminish the value of Occupational Advisory Committees?** Occupational Advisory Committees should be unbiased in their review of curriculum, equipment, instructional resources, and assessments. They are expected to verify the education and training received by the students, their employees. Programs should be developed to meet the foundational knowledge and skills of entry-level employment. Unique regional needs can be represented through electives. If there is collective feedback representing fundamental changes in the industry, this would generally be consistent throughout the state.

**What if faculty from multiple institutions cannot reach a consensus?** This initiative is a directive from the Board. Administrators are expected to recommend the participation of faculty who can collaborate and address issues with faculty who are unable to accept or implement the changes.

**How do we address unique instructor qualifications?** Programs should be developed to meet the foundational knowledge and skills of entry-level employment. Faculty should have extensive and broad industry experience to teach at this level as a minimum, as this would represent common industry practices.

**How do we address differences in equipment in programs and laboratories?** Foundational instruction should be developed with objectives and competencies that allow for differences in equipment used by entry-level employees.