



## Professional-Technical Program Approval Process

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All professional-technical degree and certificate programs must be approved by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (State Board) prior to program implementation (see excerpts from the State Board [Policy Manual](#) (Chapter 4, 4.40.00). As part of this responsibility, the State Board sets rules/procedures/guidelines, developed in cooperation with the college system, that provide for the approval of all proposed new professional/technical programs, curriculum modifications, and program title changes. Following are the guidelines for approval of professional-technical programs.

### DEFINITIONS

- A. A **professional-technical** program prepares students for employment in a specific industry.
- B. An **associate degree** program conventionally entails approximately two academic years of study, i.e., 90 credits, or two years of 45 credits each. WAC 250-61-050 defines “associate degree” as a lower division undergraduate degree that requires no fewer than 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours. Some highly technical programs may require more than this to ensure that students have the necessary preparation to succeed.

RCW 28B.50.140(12) states, “May grant to every student, upon graduation or completion of a course of study, a suitable diploma, degree, or certificate under the rules of the state board for community and technical colleges that are appropriate to their mission. The purposes of these diplomas, certificates, and degrees are to lead individuals directly to employment in a specific occupation or prepare individuals for a bachelor's degree or beyond. Technical colleges may only offer transfer degrees that prepare students for bachelor's degrees in professional fields, subject to rules adopted by the college board.”

RCW 28B.50.215 states, “Technical colleges may, under the rules of the state board for community and technical colleges offer all specific academic support courses that may be at a transfer level that are required of all students to earn a particular degree or certificate. This shall not be interpreted to mean that their mission may be expanded to include transfer preparation, nor does it preclude technical colleges from voluntarily and cooperatively using available community college courses as components of technical college programs.”

- C. An **associate in applied science–transfer (AAS-T)** degree is built upon the technical courses required for job preparation but also includes a college-level general education component, common in structure for all such degrees. Further, the general education courses for the degree are drawn from the same list as those taken by students completing the Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) associate degree or the Associate in Science-Transfer (AS-T) degree. These degrees are consistent with the dual purpose of transfer and preparation for direct employment.

The general education component of the transferable technical degree is to be comprised of not less than 20 credits of courses generally accepted in transfer. These 20 credits must include as a **minimum** the following:

5 credits in Communication	English Composition
5 credits in Quantitative Skills	Any course from the generally accepted in transfer list with Intermediate Algebra as a prerequisite
10 credits in Science, Social Science, or Humanities	Courses selected from the generally accepted in transfer list including a course meeting the human relations requirement.

The 20 credit **minimum** is proposed in recognition of the difficulty that some technical programs would have in adding even more general education credits to their degree. Yet other technical degrees would go beyond the 20 credits minimum because the technical program may already include transferable courses including the introductory course in the technical field.

- D. A **certificate** is an award which may be made for completion of the competencies and requirements for an occupational program. Certificates less than 45 credit hours in length do not necessarily include related instruction. Certificates 45 credit hours or longer must include related instruction as a component. The requirement for related instruction can be found in [Standard Two, section 2.C.9](#) of the Accreditation Standards from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities ([www.nwccu.org](http://www.nwccu.org)).
- E. A **primary program** is any prescribed program of studies 20 credits or greater of instruction leading to initial employment or improvement of occupational skills. A primary program may have options.
- F. A **program option** is a variant of a primary program. At least 50 percent of the option must be drawn from the technical core of the primary program curriculum. (If less than 50 percent of the curriculum is from the technical core of the primary program, the college must apply for a new primary program.) Options are inventoried as separate programs and listed under the umbrella of the primary program.
- G. An **individualized education program** is a program that offers unique opportunities for a few students, and is designed to meet the career goals of the individual student. The education is to be accomplished on an individual basis with the technical portion of the program occurring in a work environment as contracted instruction or a cooperative arrangement. Degrees or certificates are issued for these programs. The total state completions in one occupation should not exceed probable job opportunities, but no more than four students should be enrolled at any point in time.

**APPROVAL CRITERIA AND PROCESS**

- A. **Programs of Less than 20 Credits.** No formal approval is required, but short-term certificates must be registered with the State Board office. Colleges will submit to the State Board staff, at a minimum, the program title, CIP and EPC codes, program description or learning outcomes, course listing, and number of credits.

- B. **Programs 20 Credits or Greater.** After the State Board staff endorses the “Professional-Technical Program Approval Request” (form *PAR*) for a new primary program, the college will submit any additional documentation required for final approval within six months. The State Board staff will notify the college within two weeks of receipt of the documentation as to any additional documentation that will be required before final approval is granted. Once final approval is granted, the program will be recorded on the college’s inventory of approved vocational programs.
- C. **AAS-T Degree Programs.** If a professional-technical associate degree program is already approved, the college need submit only the title of the approved professional-technical degree for which the AAS-T degree will be offered, the appropriate CIP and EPC codes, and a program/curriculum guide (list by course number, course title, credits per course, and total credits). If a professional-technical degree is not already approved, the college must submit appropriate documentation to support the addition of a primary or option.

#### D. Sequence of Actions

1. A college determines to seek approval for a new professional-technical program. Collaboration between colleges contributes to informed program decision-making, which benefits the state as well as the local community. Colleges should work collaboratively before submitting a request for a new program to the State Board office, avoiding overly competitive or adversarial approaches to new program startups. The proposing college will provide evidence of collaboration with those colleges that have programs that are the same or similar to that which is being proposed.

Some of the questions that need be answered when proposing a new program include:

- Who are potential regional and statewide colleges (those with similar programs) that might be impacted by this program start-up? (You may contact the State Board for a list of similar currently-approved programs.)
  - How might start-up of this program at your college impact those programs (including, but not limited to, student base, employment opportunities, clinical space, and work-based learning sites)?
  - Does the program prepare graduates to obtain living wage employment?
  - Does the program require approvals/accreditations/certifications external to the State Board (e.g. Nursing Commission - See Page 6-J)?
2. In the case of a new **primary** program:
    - a. The college submits a “Professional-Technical Program Approval Request” (form *PAR*) to the State Board office, along with documentation described on that form.
    - b. The State Board staff will notify all community and technical colleges concerning the *PAR* via e-mail. A community or technical college **opposing** a *PAR* must provide written/e-mail notification of such opposition and rationale to the initiating college and the State Board office within three calendar weeks of the date notification that was e-mailed from the State

Board office. Objections will be discussed between the chief instructional officers of the initiating and objecting colleges before they are forwarded to the State Board office.

c. If a college objects:

- (1) The objecting college(s) must provide evidence of attempts to collaborate. They must also provide evidence of how the proposed program will negatively impact existing program, including, but not limited to, student base, employment opportunities, clinical space, and work-based learning sites. In the case of programs offered via distance education, school(s) opposing the offering must thoroughly explain the negative impacts expected if the program is approved; i.e., unnecessary duplication or unfair competition.
- (2) The colleges will attempt to resolve the opposition. If agreement cannot be reached, the opposing college(s) must submit documentation that shows evidence of harm and unsuccessful attempts to collaborate to the State Board office within three calendar weeks of the *PAR* e-mail notification to the system.
- (3) Within 14 working days the State Board staff will assemble an advisory panel that may include education representatives, other workforce education directors, and other experts in the field, if they are reasonably available. This panel will recommend to the Executive Director of the State Board whether to sustain or over-rule the opposition to the *PAR*. The results of the decision of the Executive Director of the State Board will be final; therefore, it is imperative that dissenting rationale be well thought out and documented appropriately.

Within seven working days after the advisory panel has met, the State Board staff will advise the originating community or technical college whether the proposed program has been endorsed or rejected. If opposed, the reasons for rejection will be explained.

d. After the State Board staff endorses a *PAR*, the initiating community or technical college must submit to the State Board office any additional/final documentation within six months. Once all documentation is received and approved, the program will be entered on the college's inventory of approved vocational programs. If final documentation needed to complete the approval is not received within the six-month period, the request will lapse, and reactivation will require the initiation of a new *PAR*. The six-month limitation may be waived in relation to the capital budget request or other circumstances that are beyond the control of the initiating district.

3. In the case of a new **option** or **contract program** the documentation required for approval of an option is the same as that for a primary program. The process differs in that the *PAR* is not sent to the colleges for the three-week comment period.
4. Courses must be offered and students enrolled in a program within one year of the date of approval. The State Board staff may grant an extension for cause; e.g., capital construction delays.

5. Following approval by the State Board office, a college may advertise, offer, or conduct professional-technical programs. A degree, certificate, or diploma recognizing successful completion of the program or prescribed course of study covered by this policy shall be awarded students who satisfy program requirements. Degree, certificate, or diploma programs shall meet all requirements of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.
  6. The State Board staff will distribute a quarterly report of programs approved or modified during the preceding quarter to all community and technical colleges within the system. Once a program is formally approved and listed on the quarterly report, it will continue to be approved as long as it is not “substantively” changed in such a way as to cause it to lose its original content or context.
- E. **Collaborative Programs.** When a college, without approval for a professional-technical program, wishes to collaborate with another college that does have approval, the college requesting the collaboration will send to the State Board office a signed memorandum of understanding between the colleges providing the details of the partnership. The program will be added to the requesting college’s inventory under a separate category titled Collaborative Programs. A unique EPC will be issued for collaborative programs.
- F. **State Funded Contract Programs.** There are four types of contracts under which a college may offer courses—regular, supplemental, shared funding, and international student (see Chapter 4, Appendix J and Chapter 5, Section 5.90.40 of the State Board [Policy Manual](#)). Contracted programs with Department of Corrections, Job Skills Program, military, private industry, or others 20 credits or greater shall be submitted to the State Board office using normal approval procedures described in section D.3 above.
- G. **Individualized Education Program Specialty Approval.** Each college shall submit to the State Board office a form IEP for each individual enrolled in an individualized education program prior to beginning of instruction. The approval will expire for each individual at the conclusion of that individual’s training or separation from the program.

Each community and technical college using work-based learning processes shall have on file contracts as outlined in the [Policy Manual](#) (Chapter 4, Appendix E) and a detailed program for each student. If an employer-employee relationship exists, each student enrolled must be paid by the employer at the minimum wage or greater. Internships or other employment-based training situations are treated on an individual basis by each campus, but in no case will these situations result in displacement of employed workers.

- H. **Program Curriculum Modifications and Title Changes.** Any change to program title or curriculum modifications which result in a change to total credits must be approved by the State Board staff prior to the college offering the modified program. The college must submit an email of request and include a copy of the revised program/curriculum guide.

A program modification which increases a program from a certificate to a degree requires a new program approval request as a primary or option.

## I. **Inactive and Intermittent Programs**

1. **Inactive Programs.** Approved programs or options that become inactive for any reason (i.e., budgetary, job needs fulfilled, housekeeping, start-up delayed, etc.) may be placed in the inactive category on the program inventory by campus request made in writing to the State Board office. The purpose of this category is to allow a campus ample time to study the continued need or allow some time for program modification and facility, equipment, or instructor acquisition.

Upon request, State Board staff is available to assist colleges with a program viability analysis by conducting an onsite program review with a team that may include other workforce education directors, industry representatives, and others deemed appropriate. The format used in this process can be found in Appendix B.

The maximum time that a program may remain in an inactive status is three years. If a program is not reinstated to active status during the three-year period, it will be removed from the respective college's inventory.

To reinstate a program from inactive to active status, the campus must make the request on form REIN and include all information requested on the form.

2. **Intermittent Programs.** Approved programs or options that are conducted on an intermittent basis (i.e., every other quarter, once every two years, etc.) are listed on the program inventory in a separate category. This listing alerts the State Board office of possible voids in enrollment information, as well as notification to prospective students. A program may be placed in this category by written request of the campus to the State Board office.

- J. **Nursing Programs.** In the case of new Nursing program the documentation required for approval is the same for either a new primary or option program (see 2-D and 3). The process differs in that prior to approval and implementation of the program the college must submit to the State Board office the following documentation:

- a. The submitted Program Approval Request (PAR) must include assurances of clinical sites.
- b. Before final approval of the program, the college must receive approval from the Nursing Commission. A copy of the Nursing Commission approval letter must be submitted to the State Board.

## **PROCESS FOR TERMINATION OF PROGRAMS**

A community or technical college district may, at its own discretion, terminate a program and shall notify the State Board office of such action within six weeks of the time that the program is terminated. Once a program is terminated, the State Board office will maintain as active for a maximum of three years the coding associated with that program.

If a college desires assistance in conducting a program analysis, the State Board staff will assemble an external team of experts to conduct the analysis, and will provide recommendations to the requesting college (see Appendix B).

**List of Professional-Technical Program Approval Forms:**

ADV – Professional-Technical Advisory/Planning Committee  
IEP – Professional-Technical Individualized Education Program Approval  
PAR – Program Approval Request  
REIN – Request for Inactive Program/Option Reinstatement

**APPENDIX A – BACKGROUND**

RCW 28B.50.090, College Board – Powers and Duties, states the following:

The college board shall have general supervision and control over the state system of community and technical colleges. In addition to the other powers and duties imposed upon the college board by this chapter, the college board shall be charged with the following powers, duties and responsibilities:

(3) Ensure, through the full use of its authority:

(a) That each college district, in coordination with colleges, within a regional area, shall offer thoroughly comprehensive educational, training, and service programs to meet the needs of both the communities and students served by combining high standards of excellence in academic transfer courses; realistic and practical courses in occupational education, both graded and ungraded; and community services of an educational, cultural, and recreational nature; and adult education, including basic skills and general, family, and workforce literacy programs and services;

(7) Establish minimum standards to govern the operation of the community and technical colleges with respect to:

(a) Qualifications and credentials of instructional and key administrative personnel, except as otherwise provided in the state plan for vocational education.  
(b) Internal budgeting, accounting, auditing, and financial procedures as necessary to supplement the general requirements prescribed pursuant to chapter 43.88 RCW. (c) The content of the curriculums and other educational and training programs, and the requirement for degrees and certificate awarded by the colleges.

The State Board *Policy Manual*, Chapter 4 (<https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/policies-rules/policymanual/chapter-4.aspx>), section 4.20.00, Degree Requirements, states in part:

The content of the curricula and other educational and training programs (see RCW 28B.50.090(7)(c)) and the requirements for degrees, certificates, and high school diplomas awarded by the state’s community and technical colleges must follow guidelines established by the State Board .

Section 4.40.00, Professional-Technical Programs, states in part:

All professional-technical degree and certificate programs must be approved by the State Board prior to course or program implementation (see RCW 28B.50.090(7)(c)). As part of this responsibility, the State Board:

1. Sets rules/procedures/guidelines, developed in cooperation with the college system, that provide for the approval of all proposed new professional-technical programs, curriculum modifications and program title changes.
2. Requires that colleges certify professional-technical staff and faculty as provided by WAC 13116-070 through WAC 131-16-095.

Section 4.40.20, Advisory Committees for Professional-Technical Programs, describes the requirement for each professional-technical program to have an industry advisory committee.

#### **APPENDIX B – PROGRAM VIABILITY ANALYSIS**

All programs should be continually reviewed for their effectiveness in meeting the training needs of industry, as well as in fulfilling the mission of the college. Programs failing to meet these needs should be subject to review for viability. The outcome of the review may involve program revision or elimination. Many factors are considered during this process:

1. Is enrollment adequate? Each program has an established average enrollment number that is determined by the college, in collaboration with the faculty, program director, and advisory committee, following analysis of the program curriculum needs: facility and equipment availability, safety factors, and the optimal number of students that the instructor(s) can successfully manage at one time. Is this established average enrollment figure being met?

The established average enrollment is listed on the State Board’s inventory of approved professional-technical programs for the college as “maximum enrollment.”

Enrollment is determined to be inadequate when the program’s average enrollment is 75 percent or less of the established average enrollment figure. A review of the program should be triggered at any point in time that the enrollment dips below the 75 percent standard. During the review, up to three years of enrollment figures may be analyzed.

2. Does the program meet industry standards? Are the industry-validated competencies being successfully met by program graduates? If industry certification/formal recognition exists, has the program achieved said certification/formal recognition?
3. Are there sufficient employment opportunities for program graduates, and are graduates obtaining employment in the field?
4. Do entry-level wages exceed minimum wage?
5. Are there career advancement opportunities available for those graduates who perform successfully on the job?



6. Is the program advisory committee actively involved and supportive of the program?
7. Is the program cost-effective/economically supportable?
8. Other factors that may be determined during the process that may impact program viability.

While enrollment is a key factor considered in the review process, all factors listed above are important considerations and any of them could be a determinant for program viability even though adequate enrollment may exist.