



Community College Program Approval Guidance

Overview

This document contains guidance regarding the requirements for a community college's career and technical education (CTE) certificate program approval.

Criteria for Approval

A certificate award will be evaluated according to the requirements described below. Each certificate is reviewed and approved by the Department of Education through the CurricUNET system in accordance with Iowa Code section 260C.14.

Award Requirements

Iowa Administrative Rules 281 - IAC 21.2(9)(h): Certificate. *The certificate is awarded upon completion of a state-approved program of study that is designed for entry-level employment and shall consist of a maximum of 48 semester (72 quarter) credit hours. A certificate may be a component of and apply toward subsequent completion of a diploma or associate of applied science or associate of applied arts degree and may be developed in rapid response to the needs of business and industry. A certificate may consist of only career and technical courses and no general education course requirements.*

Note: If the certificate is a component of and applies toward subsequent completion of a diploma, associate of applied science degree, or associate of applied arts degree, then the certificate content must be consistent with the definition of the Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) number that the diploma or degree program is registered under.

An institution shall be in compliance with 281 - IAC 21.2(9)(h) if the institution provides documentation verifying at least one of the following:

- Completion of the certificate prepares a student for an SOC (standard occupational classification) established position.
- SOC occupations may be reviewed at <https://www.bls.gov/soc/home.htm>.
- The certificate award adds value and skills to an SOC established position beyond that of not having any formal coursework (i.e. increases the likelihood of being hired for that SOC position).
- The certificate award includes national or state required courses for a particular industry-identified position (e.g. Certified Nurse Aide, C++ Programmer, Microsoft Office Specialist, Sterile Processor, Phlebotomy Tech, Pharmacy Tech).
- The certificate award prepares students for a competency exam or certification (e.g. Boiler Room Maintenance Certification, Nurse Aide certification, AWS welding process, Paramedic).
- If the certificate award adds skills to a position already held, then it may be considered an advanced standing award. When a prior award is required for enrollment, the type of award needs to be stipulated in the program description (e.g. Early Childhood Administration, Predictive Maintenance, Turf Management, Expanded Dental Assistant Functions, Nitrous Oxide Monitoring).

Note: It is recommended that a certificate award follow a curricular framework such as the O*NET content model. An example of this content model may be reviewed at <https://www.onetcenter.org/content.html>.

In some cases, certificates also require training regulated by other entities. For example, for an HVAC certificate, the Iowa Plumbing and Mechanical Systems (IPMS) board licenses and regulates those working in the plumbing and mechanical systems (hydronic, HVAC, refrigeration, sheet metal) trades. The board also issues specialty licenses, contractor licenses, and medical gas piping installation certification, so anyone working in the state of Iowa in the plumbing and mechanical systems trades, or offering contract services in these trades, is required to be licensed by the board. The Department requires that a community college receive approval from IPMS to offer HVAC award options prior to obtaining state program approval.

Contact Heather Meissen at heather.meissen@iowa.gov or 515-326-5378 with comments or questions regarding this guidance or other program approval requirements. Information on state community college program approval process is available on the [Department's website](#).