

R402, Certificate and Degree Award Structures¹

R402-1 Purpose: This policy defines the awards and credentials offered by institutions in the Utah System of Higher Education ("USHE").²

R402-2 References

- 2.1. [Utah Code § 53H-3-603](#), Changes in Curriculum
- 2.2. [Utah Code § 53H-3-604](#), Common Course Numbering
- 2.3. [Board Policy R312](#), Institutional Roles and Missions and Approval of Out-of-Mission Instructional Programs
- 2.4. [Board Policy R315](#), Designation of Service Regions and Approval of Out-of-Region Instructional Programs, Branch Campuses, Instructional Service Centers, and Extension Centers
- 2.5. [Board Policy R403](#), Short-Term Training
- 2.6. [Board Policy R470](#), General Education
- 2.7. [Board Policy R471](#), Lower-Division Major Requirements and Transfer of Credits
- 2.8. [Board Policy R475](#), Common Course Numbering

R402-3 Definitions

- 3.1. **“Basic Instruction”** provided by technical colleges, means pre-college-level instruction offered in areas such as reading, language arts, and mathematics, which is necessary for student success in a technical education program. Basic instruction does not include general education courses but may parallel developmental education offered by degree-granting institutions.
- 3.2. **“Developmental Education”** means instruction designed to address knowledge and skills gaps necessary for college-level coursework. Developmental education does not grant college credit and is generally numbered below 1000 in the USHE common course numbering system. Developmental education may be eligible for credit and designated at the 1000-level when integrated into or supplementing a college-level course through co-requisite remediation models.

¹ *Adopted June 6, 2024; amended October 4, 2024; and May 15, 2025.*

² *Technical edits December 1, 2025.*

3.3. “General Education” means a set of essential learning outcomes, the foundational subject areas outlined in Utah Board of Higher Education (“Board”) [Policy R470, General Education](#), and the individual courses and the disciplines that comprise those subject areas. The foundational subject areas include written communications, quantitative literacy or mathematics, American Institutions, Humanities, fine arts, social sciences, life sciences, and physical sciences.

3.4. “Graduate Course” means courses numbered 6000 to 7999. These courses are generally limited to graduate students and graduate degrees and certificates. Graduate courses may only be offered at USHE institutions with a Board-approved mission to provide graduate-level programs.

3.5. “Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System” (“IPEDS”) means a system of interrelated surveys conducted annually by the National Center for Education Statistics (“NCES”), the primary statistical agency of the United States Department of Education, responsible for collecting, analyzing, and publishing information on the condition of American education. IPEDS gathers information from every college, university, and technical institution participating in federal student financial aid programs.

3.6. “Lower-Division Course” means a course numbered 1000-2999 and expected to be completed during the first 60 credits of study. Lower-division courses offer breadth, foundation, general education, preparation for employment, or preparation for continued study and may serve as prerequisites for upper-division courses.

3.7. “Program of Instruction” (“Program”) means a for-credit structured curriculum that leads to the knowledge and skills required for a certificate or degree and meets parameters established by institutional accreditation agencies.

3.7.1. “Academic Program” means an educational program offered by a degree-granting institution. An academic program comprises discipline-specific or interdisciplinary courses leading to an intellectual specialty, skills, and experiences necessary for meaningful employment. Academic programs lead to academic certificates or associate, bachelor's, graduate, and professional degrees as defined in this policy. Academic programs are only offered at USHE degree-granting institutions.

3.7.2. “Technical Education Program” means an undergraduate program that prepares students for employment in occupations that do not require a degree

and meets the needs of Utah's employers for technically skilled workers. Technical education programs are only offered at USHE institutions that have a technical education role.

3.7.3. Within the USHE, "technical education programs" and "academic programs" are also defined based on CIP-Code tables maintained by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education ("OCHE").

3.8. "Undergraduate program" means a program at the baccalaureate level or lower.

3.9. "Upper-Division" means courses numbered 3000 to 5999. These courses integrate and build upon learning outcomes from earlier studies and are for students beyond their first 60 credits of study in college. Upper-division courses offer specialized learning outcomes for a specific degree and provide depth, specialization, refinement, and preparation for employment or graduate study.

R402-4 Guiding Principles

- 4.1.** Institutions may only award credentials relevant to programs with applicable roles and missions as defined in [Board Policy R312, *Institutional Roles and Missions and Approval of Out-of-Mission Instructional Programs*](#), or by special Board approval for select out-of-role programs.
- 4.2.** Awards should be structured to facilitate program completion and transfer, where applicable.
- 4.3.** The total credit count for academic certificates and degrees must include all prerequisite requirements and selective admissions conditions where they exist.
- 4.4.** Foundational coursework and prerequisites for subsequent coursework should have sequential lower-division numbering to help students move consecutively through the program and provide options for the first 60 credits of study.
- 4.5.** Technical certificates and associate degrees shall not include upper-division coursework.
- 4.6.** If a USHE faculty major committee has established a lower-division major or a technical education program has undergone program alignment, the program structure must comport with the established curricular core, course numbering, and sequencing.

- 4.7. Where specific general education courses are necessary to satisfy a bachelor's degree's major program requirements, institutions must specify the courses in the bachelor's degree structure and any associated transfer associate degree structure and lower-division major maps.

R402-5 Description of Awards

5.1. Certificate

- 5.1.1. Certificates are credit-bearing credentials that may qualify for federal financial aid if of sufficient length.

5.1.2. Technical Certificate: A technical certificate:

- 5.1.2.1. Is an undergraduate, lower-division award;
- 5.1.2.2. May not substantively duplicate the curriculum content of an academic program;
- 5.1.2.3. Must be approved by the body that accredits the institution;
- 5.1.2.4. Shall meet a documented need of Utah employers within the service region and fully prepare a student for related employment in the occupational field;
- 5.1.2.5. Must meet federal definitions of Perkins eligibility requirements in a recognized occupational field;
- 5.1.2.6. May be designed to enhance student transfer into associate or bachelor's degrees associated with credential and career progression; and
- 5.1.2.7. Is the only credential for which students pay a technical education tuition rate and may only be offered at institutions with a technical college role.

- 5.1.3. Academic Certificate:** An academic certificate may be an undergraduate, post-bachelor's, master's, or post-master's-level award.

- 5.1.3.1. An academic certificate must offer an appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning. An academic certificate must

reflect a structured program and may not simply indicate the completion of a minimum number of credits.

5.1.3.2. An academic certificate may not substantively duplicate the curriculum content of a technical education program.

5.1.3.3. If focused on a professional specialty enhancing a degree, an academic certificate should incorporate appropriate licensure requirements and meet U.S. Department of Education regulations to notify students of licensure education requirements.

5.1.3.4. To facilitate transfer and degree completion, an institution should automatically award a general education certificate once a student has completed the general education requirements.

5.1.3.5. A supplemental academic certificate enhances a major by providing an emphasis, specialty, or interdisciplinary focus beyond the basic major requirements.

5.1.3.6. Institutions may use academic certificates to mark the completion of minors or emphases.

5.2. Associate Degree: An associate degree comprises lower-division coursework that may be structured to lead to a particular occupation or transfer to a bachelor's degree program.

5.2.1. Associate of Applied Science ("AAS") Degree: An AAS degree prepares students for entry into a particular occupation that requires more than a certificate and less than a bachelor's degree.

5.2.1.1. Wherever possible, AAS degrees should include transfer articulations for technical college programs, as outlined in [Board Policy R471, Lower-Division Major Requirements and Transfer of Credits](#). In those circumstances, the AAS degree should expand competencies acquired through technical certificates with additional advanced instruction in the subject and general education requirements added by the degree-granting institution. Institutions shall encourage students to begin with the technical certificate where such articulations exist.

5.2.1.2. Depending on occupation needs and possible transfer into an affiliated Bachelor of Applied Science degree, an AAS degree may require partial completion of the general education program and general education learning outcomes may be embedded within discipline courses needed in the program as outlined in [Board Policy R470, General Education](#).

5.2.2. Transfer Associate of Arts/Associate of Science ("AA/AS") Degree: A degree that prepares students for upper-division work in baccalaureate programs. Upon completion, students should be able to transfer to a four-year institution with junior status and complete a bachelor's degree with only 60 additional credits of study.

5.2.2.1. Transfer associate degree requirements should include completing all general education requirements outlined in [Board Policy R470, General Education](#), except in specialized associate degrees aligned with bachelor's degree major requirements that are too prescriptive to facilitate completion of general education in the first 60 credits of study. Where specific general education courses are necessary to satisfy the bachelor's degree major program requirements, institutions must specify the courses within the associate degree design.

5.2.2.2. A transfer AA/AS degree in a particular subject must be structured around the USHE-aligned lower-division major if a faculty major committee has determined one. Institutions must use the same CIP Code as the four-year program to which the student will transfer wherever possible.

5.2.2.2.1. An AA degree may require competence in a world language besides English to parallel requirements of BA degrees.

5.2.2.2.2. An AS degree may have additional science, mathematics, or technical requirements to parallel requirements of a BS degree.

5.2.2.3. Transfer AA/AS degrees should articulate across USHE whenever possible. Where systemwide articulations are not possible, institutions shall develop and maintain formal articulation agreements with four-year institution(s). Articulation agreements shall identify any additional unique requirements for seamless transfer to the four-year institution.

5.2.2.4. Specialized Associate Degree: A transfer degree that includes extensive specialized coursework and prepares students to initiate upper-division work in a particular baccalaureate program. General education requirements may be less extensive in this degree than in AA or AS degrees to meet the requirements for lower-division major preparation. Students must satisfy the receiving institution's remaining general education and upper-division baccalaureate requirements post-transfer. Specialized associate degrees have formal articulation agreements for course transfer; in some cases, articulation may be systemwide.

5.3. Bachelor's Degree: The highest level of undergraduate degree, a bachelor's degree comprises a disciplinary major or majors to develop specialized skills and knowledge and cross-disciplinary general education to develop critical thinking, analytical and ethical skills, and broad-based foundational knowledge. It includes upper-division and lower-division coursework.

5.3.1. Credit Hour Requirement

5.3.1.1. A degree-granting institution may not offer a degree with a credit-hour requirement, comprising general education and degree-specific requirements, that exceeds 120 total credit hours unless the Board approves the degree³ and:

5.3.1.1.1. The relevant degree is required for professional licensure; or

5.3.1.1.2. The relevant degree has a nationally recognized accreditation standard that mandates a higher credit-hour minimum, including circumstances where additional coursework is necessary to protect public health, safety, and welfare.

5.3.2. Characteristics

5.3.2.1. A bachelor's degree consists of undergraduate courses and should be designed so that upper-division courses are not required in the first 60 credits. Courses identified as preparatory should be the same or similar to courses offered by two-year programs in the same discipline. A

³ Degree-granting institutions that offer degree(s) that exceed 120 total credit hours are required to obtain Board approval in order to continue to offer the relevant degree(s).

bachelor's degree should be part of the systemwide articulation processes of lower-division majors where faculty major committees have developed those. A bachelor's degree uses common course numbers outlined in Board policies [R471, *Lower-Division Major Requirements and Transfer of Credits*](#) and [R475, *Common Course Numbering*](#).

5.3.2.2. The completion of required preparatory, lower-division courses may not be sufficient for admission to selective majors with limits on the number of students who may pursue the major. Admissions requirements, such as minimal Grade Point Averages and exam scores, should be explained to students early in their program.

5.3.3. Bachelor of Arts (“BA”) and Bachelor of Science (“BS”) Degrees:

5.3.3.1. A BA degree may require competence in a world language besides English.

5.3.3.2. A BS degree may have additional science, mathematics, or technical requirements.

5.3.4. Professional Bachelor's Degree: A bachelor's degree that prepares students for a particular profession by emphasizing skills and practical analysis built upon theory and research. Specialized accreditation sets acceptable practice standards. Professional degrees may be designed to lead to third-party licensure and must meet U.S. Department of Education requirements to notify students how the program meets licensure education requirements.

5.3.5. Bachelor of Applied Science (“BAS”): A bachelor's degree focusing on workforce preparation and links to industry or organizations where opportunities for applied learning are available to students. A BAS degree may be designed as a completion program that builds upon an Associate of Applied Science degree or technical or academic certificates. The BAS must be structured to allow for completion of the general education requirements that were not included in the AAS degree.

5.3.6. Bachelor of Applied Studies (“BAP”): A bachelor's degree for which the major requirements plus the General Education and institutional requirements are fewer than 120 credits. A BAP degree must have a minimum of 90 credits

and must measurably demonstrate disciplinary competencies, mastery of subject matter, and student learning outcomes comparable to and mapped to those of 120-credit degree programs in the same subject, with the elimination only of unstructured, non-essential electives from outside the major resulting in fewer credits.

5.3.7. Multidisciplinary and General Studies Bachelor's Degree: A bachelor's degree that encourages specialization in multiple academic disciplines. Institutions may use this degree to facilitate completion. Multidisciplinary degrees typically provide flexibility that allows students to select a combination of disciplines focused on particular or individualized career and academic objectives. Degree requirements must meet institution graduation requirements, be structured to ensure rigor appropriate for a bachelor's degree, and demonstrate the integration of content and learning experiences across the disciplines. Institutions must use a General Studies or Interdisciplinary Studies CIP code. Institutions may offer these degrees as BA, BS, or another designation such as Bachelor of Integrated Studies ("BIS"), Bachelor of General Studies ("BGS"), or Bachelor of University Studies ("BUS").

5.4. Master's Degree: The first level of graduate degree.

5.4.1. Master of Arts ("MA") and Master of Science ("MS") Degrees: Graduate degrees based on academic subjects that require original student research or a creative project and may be designed to lead to a doctoral degree.

5.4.2. Professional Master's Degree: A master's degree that prepares students for entry into a particular occupation and may lead to third-party licensure. Specialty accreditation may dictate coursework and the number of required credits. Programs must meet U. S. Department of Education regulations to notify students whether they meet the educational requirements for licensure.

5.5. Doctoral Degree: A graduate-level degree in an advanced, specialized field of study.

5.5.1. Research Doctoral Degree: A research doctoral degree generally requires study, preparation, and defense of original research or execution of an original project demonstrating substantial artistic or scholarly achievement.

5.5.2. Professional Practice or Clinical Doctoral Degree: A professional or clinical doctoral degree provides knowledge and skills for credentials or licenses required for professional practice. It generally does not require the same level of original research as a research doctoral degree and may require extensive clinical practice. Programs must meet U. S. Department of Education regulations to notify students whether they meet the educational requirements for licensure.

R402-6 Award Criteria for Program Approval by Board of Trustees: An institution’s Board of Trustees may approve certificate and degree programs that comport with the parameters of Table 1, so long as they are within the institutional role and service region as outlined in Board policies [R312](#), [Institutional Roles and Missions and Approval of Out-of-Mission Instructional Programs](#) or [R315](#), [Designation of Service Regions and Approval of Out-of-Region Instructional Programs, Branch Campuses, Instructional Service Centers, and Extension Centers](#). Programs that do not meet the parameters in Table 1 require approval by the Board as outlined in those policies.

6.1. Minimum Credits for Technical Certificates: An existing technical certificate program that falls under the three-credit minimum may be counted for performance funding under [Board Policy R522, Annual Performance Goal Setting and Funding Determination](#) through the 2026-2027 academic year, however, all such programs must either meet the minimum credit requirements or be considered short-term training no later than the end of that time period.

Table 1 – Program Criteria

| Program | Semester Credit Hours | Special Curricular Conditions | Unique Conditions |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Technical Certificate | Must be a minimum of 3 credits and a maximum of 51 credits. | Under Utah Code sections 53B-1-101.5(8)(b) and 53B-2a-106(2)(b) , technical education may provide basic instruction and shall not include general education. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May only be offered by institutions with a technical college role. • Must use an appropriate technical CIP Code as outlined in the OCHE table. |
| Academic Undergraduate Certificate | Must be a minimum of 9 credits and a maximum of 36 credits. | May include general education courses as appropriate. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May only be offered by degree-granting institutions. • Must use an appropriate academic CIP Code as outlined in the OCHE table. |
| Applied Associate of Science Degree | Must be a minimum of 60 credits and a maximum of 69 credits. | May include only a portion of the general education requirements (minimum of 9 credits) outlined in Board | Must use an appropriate academic CIP Code as outlined in the OCHE table. |

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| | | <u>Policy R470, General Education in keeping with accreditation requirements.</u> | |
| Transfer Associate Degree | Must be a minimum of 60 credits and a maximum of 63 credits. | Must meet all general education requirements as outlined in <u>Board Policy R470, General Education.</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where a bachelor's degree exists in the same discipline, there must be at least one articulation agreement with a four-year institution for transfer with junior standing. (See <u>Board Policy R470, General Education.</u>) • Must align with the appropriate lower-division major if a USHE faculty major committee has established one. (See <u>Board Policy R470, General Education.</u>) |
| Specialized Associate Degree | Must be a minimum of 60 credits and a maximum of 85 credits. Includes a minimum of 28 credit hours of specialized coursework. | May be incomplete prior to transfer, per articulation agreements and transfer baccalaureate major maps. | Formal articulation agreements must be made for affiliated bachelor's degrees. |
| Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, and Professional Bachelor Degrees | Requires 120 credits (specific programs may have a maximum of 126 credits if approved by the Board and required by program accreditation or professional licensure). | Must meet all general education requirements as outlined in <u>Board Policy R470, General Education.</u> | Must align with the appropriate lower-division major if a USHE faculty major committee has established one. (See <u>Board Policy R470, General Education.</u>) |
| Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS)/Bachelor of Applied Studies (BAP) | Minimum of 90 and maximum of 120 credits (specific programs may have a maximum of 126 credits if approved by the Board and required by program accreditation or professional licensure). | Must meet all general education requirements as outlined in <u>Board Policy R470, General Education.</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must align with the appropriate lower-division major if a USHE faculty major committee has established one. • May be designed to build upon AAS or academic or technical certificate programs. |
| Post-Bachelor's Certificates | Requires less than 30 credits. | Not Applicable | Requires completion of a bachelor's degree. |
| Master's Degree | Requires 30 to 36 credits. Professional master's programs may require additional coursework | Not Applicable | Generally requires completion of a bachelor's degree. |

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| | or projects to meet accreditation requirements. | | |
| Post-Master's Certificate | Requires less than 30 credits. | Not Applicable | Requires completion of a master's degree. |
| Doctoral Degree | Determined by disciplinary standards | Not Applicable | Requires completion of a bachelor's degree and may require a master's degree where appropriate for the discipline. |