

Wisconsin Technical College System Waiting List Guidance for Limited Enrollment Programs

Guidance Statement

This guidance outlines the procedures for managing waiting lists for college programs with limited spots within The Wisconsin Technical College System. This guidance aims to ensure transparent, consistent and fair access to these programs following state rules and regulations while providing appropriate support for student success.

Enrollment Policies

To ensure compliance with Chapter 38 of the Wisconsin Statutes and TCS 10 of the Administrative Code, each district must establish and maintain an enrollment policy that describes the processes and procedures by which students enroll in the college and into specific programs, including maintaining waiting lists (TCS 10.07(5)). Colleges are not permitted to maintain a separate process for students due to program capacity limitations. The enrollment policy must address all elements referenced in this guidance.

Waiting list Process

For any program in which there are fewer spots available than students interested in enrolling, a program must set up and maintain a waiting list. Pursuant to TCS10.07, waiting lists shall follow the criteria outlined below and shall not include any type of ranking criteria. Waiting lists must be available to WTCS upon request to confirm compliance with this policy.

1. A student interested in enrolling in a program with a waiting list shall submit a program application. (TCS 10.07(1)(a))
 - a. The application can be completed on paper or online and collects basic information including the student's name, identification number, email address, intended program/degree title, and date of submission.
 - b. For each district program, districts may limit the number of applications accepted or limit the time period during which applications are accepted. (TCS 10.07(1)(b))
2. The date of submission, the date in which the application is electronically submitted or postmarked if mailed, for the program application is then recorded for their spot within the program waiting list. Their application is cross-referenced with student enrollment information to determine their residency status (in-district, in-state but outside of district, or out of state) which is also recorded within the waiting list. (TCS 10.07(2))
3. As spots become available within the program, students from the waiting list are notified and allowed to enroll in the program courses in the order of their waiting list date (date of submission of program application or completed application) from earliest date to latest date. A student's residency status also determines their priority within the waiting list for admission to the program. (TCS 10.07(2))
 - a. In-district residents are given priority over non-district state residents in the following cases:
 - i. For programs that start anytime during the fall semester, program applications that are submitted on or before the preceding January 1
 - ii. For programs that start anytime during the spring semester, program applications that are submitted on or before the preceding May 1

- iii. For programs that start anytime during the summer semester, program applications that are submitted on or before the preceding October 1
- b. After these dates in i, ii, and iii; in-district and non-district state residents will have equal priority in the waiting list. (TCS 10.07(3))
- c. Waiting list status will roll over each term and waiting list applicants shall have priority over all other applicants for admission in subsequent terms. (TCS 10.07(5)(c))
- d. Out of state: Non-state residents shall be admitted to programs, *after district and non-district state residents, as spaces remain available. Colleges can also decide to not allow out-of-state residents to apply to programs.* (s.38.22(1)(d))
- e. Associate of Arts and Associate of Science program applicants, defined as collegiate transfer programs in s. [38.01 \(3\)](#), Stats., shall be considered for admission without respect to their residence category.

4. For each term that a student is on the waiting list but not able to enroll in the program, the college must notify the student in writing of their waiting list spot (e.g., the tenth student on the list) and provide the student with the option to either stay on the waiting list or be removed from the waiting list. Failure of the student to respond to the college within the specified timeframe established by the college may result in the college removing the student from the waiting list. (TCS 10.07(5)(b))

- a. If a student is eligible to enroll in the program since they are at the top of the waiting list, but wants to defer for any reason, they can defer program enrollment to remain on the waiting list and maintain their spot. (TCS 10.07(5)(d))
- b. A student's status as a pregnant or parenting student as related to Title IX should not affect their waiting list placement unless directed by the student.
- c. Waiting list applicants may renew their waiting list status for each subsequent term until admission is achieved. (TCS 10.07(5)(d))

Academic Preparedness

Some programs require prerequisite coursework and/or other academic measures to ensure that students are prepared for program courses and to complete program requirements. These requirements must only include the *minimum* of what is outlined under state licensure and accreditation requirements and what is needed to help a student prepare for the program curriculum. Any requirements above this minimum can have disproportionate and discriminatory effects on students from historically excluded backgrounds and are not permitted under federal law according to the [Methods of Administration Guidelines § IV.K](#). Colleges must define the minimum academic preparedness requirements for each program and provide justification to the Methods of Administrator Coordinator for Postsecondary Career and Technical Education as part of [civil rights compliance reviews](#). Pursuant to federal law, these academic measures must be objective measures of student academic performance, not subjective criteria (e.g., essays and interviews). In accordance with best practices of Guided Career Pathways, students who do not meet minimum requirements should be provided academic support to get the student program ready. These supports should come at no cost to the student where feasible.

For these academic preparedness requirements, colleges must offer multiple ways for students to satisfy these requirements, including transfer credit, dual credit, credit for prior learning assessment, and completing the course at the college with a passing grade. Exams (e.g. HESI, CLEP,) could be used to satisfy academic preparedness requirements, but these exams should be available at no or limited cost to students. The National Association of Student Financial Aid

Administrators cite that financial barriers beyond tuition are considered substantial financial barriers to students and should be considered carefully. Testing may be used to determine if students meet minimum standards but shall not be used to establish a ranked order for the waiting list (45 CFR § 80).

Based upon best practices from the Community College Research Center, Guided Career Pathways recommends meeting with an academic advisor to develop academic plans for every student based on program maps. This would include discussing academic preparedness and any prerequisite coursework for the program and their options to satisfy the criteria. Students can work on their prerequisite coursework requirements while on the waiting list for the program. If they are still working on the prerequisite coursework requirements when they would be allowed to enroll in the program, since they are at the top of the waiting list, then the student must be notified that although they are first in line on the waiting list that they still must finish the prerequisite course criteria. The college must provide the student with the option to either stay on the waiting list or be removed from the waiting list. If they decide to stay on the waiting list, they then stay in the same waiting list spot (e.g. top on the waiting list), so that once they do complete the prerequisite criteria, they will be able to enroll into the program in the next available opening.

[Shared Programs](#)

Shared programs are identified as “joint programs” under TCS10.07(6). If a program is jointly sponsored by two or more districts, the participating districts may agree on the number of students from each sponsoring district who are to be treated as district residents of the district at which the program is offered. (TCS 10.07(6))

[Holding Program Spots for Special Circumstances](#)

Each district board may adopt a policy to reserve a reasonable number of program spaces to accommodate admission for students in special circumstances. District special circumstances' policies and revisions to those policies are subject to state board review and approval. (TCS 10.07(5M)) Colleges need to submit special circumstances policies to the System Office for approval as outlined in the procedures of the Educational Services Manual.

Factors which may be considered for special circumstance admissions include, but are not limited to:

- Hardship
- Participation in school-to-work programs
- Special need
- Enrollment diversity
- Nontraditional occupation enrollment
- Needs of local employers (e.g., bilingual workers)
- Military-connected students

Colleges must clearly communicate the criteria for special circumstances admission to students who are interested in applying to the program (i.e., submitting program application form), and the selection process will be transparent and consistent. Colleges may require program applicants seeking special circumstance admission to provide additional documentation or information to support their request.

Data and Reporting

Colleges must make waiting lists available to the System Office upon request to confirm compliance with this policy.

Public Transparency and Information for Prospective Students

The Higher Learning Commission's Public Information Policy [FDCR.A.10.070](#), requires that colleges make available to students and the public fair, accurate and complete information related to admissions. Programs with waiting lists must be readily identified and provide transparent information on the college's public website including:

- The average number of terms it takes a student to move from the program waiting list (application submission date) to enrollment in core courses.
- Number of spots available for the core courses each year or term.

Implementation

This guidance will be effective starting July 1, 2024. Colleges will be given one year to revise policies accordingly. This guidance will be effective for all students who apply to programs after June 30, 2025.

Review and Audits

The System Office will annually audit college data and information to ensure compliance with this guidance per [TCS10.07](#). Colleges that have not implemented a policy that complies with TCS10.07 for students entering the January 2026 cohort will receive a state aid penalty.

Policies will be audited in June 2025. Colleges out of compliance with TCS10.07 in subsequent years will receive state aid penalties with graduated increases.