

# WTCS Program Focus Areas Requirements and Guidance

## Guidelines for Creating Focus Areas

### Summary and Purpose

WTCS programs are approved by the WTCS Board with regard to substantiated in-district industry demand and needs, as evidenced by college-provided analysis of need based on current labor market information, local advisory committee recommendations and applicable industry standards. Approved programs are directly tied to specific job outcome(s) via national labor market codes (CIP/SOC) and tasked with delivering consistent programming that meets these job outcomes.

### Focus Area Definition

In meeting local employer needs and providing relevant education to the local workforce, there are occasions when further learning specificity is desired within a labor market. WTCS recognizes this specificity in the form of program focus areas, which allow for customized learning opportunities within standard program outcomes. Focus areas are intended to create flexible options to explore specialty topics within a program. Focus areas must not disrupt program outcomes nor establish new pathways to different job outcomes. Focus areas must maintain adequate differentiation while addressing the desired specificity within the program.

### Eligible Programs

Focus areas are built through the use of alternate courses in approved program curricula. The use of alternate courses to create focus areas is only permitted in associate degree programs and standalone technical diploma programs (2-year, 1-year and less-than-1-year). Alternate courses, and thus focus areas, are **not allowed** in embedded technical diplomas (ETDs), pathway certificates (PWC), associate of arts (AA) or associate of science (AS) programs, or shared programs.

Note that focus areas differ from AA/AS pre-major pathways. Please see Educational Services Manual (ESM) Chapter 2 regarding pre-major pathway definitions and their allowability within AA/AS programs.

When considering adding focus areas to a program, colleges must consult with the relevant program advisory committee and the relevant WTCS Director prior to submitting the curriculum for approval in the CCP portal.

## Implementation

Focus areas may be established by assigning alternate courses to primary technical or occupationally-specific courses within a program. A program can have no more than three focus areas, as demonstrated by one focus area established by the primary technical courses, and up to 2 additional focus areas built from alternate course options. Focus areas must not disrupt student attainment of program outcomes nor change intended job outcome(s) of the program. Careful consideration of which primary courses should host alternate courses and focus area(s) is critical. Additional rules surrounding the use of alternate courses and focus areas are listed in the Restrictions and Requirements section of this guidance.

Focus areas should be defined by the college and supported by evidence of industry need, including documented advisory committee recommendation. Functionally, alternate courses mirror program elective courses, allowing for a degree of student choice in course selection. College may locally determine appropriate primary and alternate courses to comprise each focus area. Students would select the focus area they wished to take and complete the associated course(s) within it. Focus area coursework would not result in any additional designation or identification with regard to the awarded program credential.

**Example:** An automotive program might require a core of technical courses and also offer up to three focus areas by providing primary and alternate course options for those specific subjects. The college would determine which course(s) comprised each focus area and, if more than one course were involved, require students to complete all associated courses within that focus area.

### 32-404-2 Automotive Technician (standalone technical diploma program)

<b>Focus Area 1: Alternative Fuel</b>	<b>Focus Area 2: Service Writing</b>	<b>Focus Area 3: Advanced Performance</b>
Primary Course	Alternate Course 1	Alternate Course 2
Alt Fuel Systems 1	Service Writing	Adv Performance 1
Alt Fuel Systems 2	Shop Management	Adv Performance 2

## Restrictions and Requirements

### Flexibility

Alternative courses need not have the same credit value as the primary course they are replacing. However, the program's required credit range (minimum and maximum credit range) must be met regardless of which configuration of courses a student takes on their path to program completion.

### Credit Limits

No more than 30 percent of the primary course credits designated as technical, occupational-specific and advanced technical studies (together referred to as "technical studies credits") may have alternates. For instance, if a curriculum has a total of 40 technical studies credits, then no more than 12 credits of the primary courses may have alternate course credits.

40 total technical studies credits x 0.30 = 12 primary course credits may have designated alternate courses

The CCP Portal will calculate this limitation as indicated in Curriculum Error 25 found in the WTCS CCP System Curriculum Manual. CCP function in program (FIP) codes identify each of these types of credits as follows:

Occupational Specific: FIP Code 01

Technical Studies: FIP Code 07

Advanced Technical Studies: FIP Code 08

### Logical Alignment with Program

Every focus area must be on a logical path of program completion and align with the intent of the approved program. In addition, colleges must maintain alignment between the program's CIP and SOC codes, regardless of whether a student completes only the primary courses of the program or chooses allowable alternate courses within a focus area of the program.

### Marketing Limits

Colleges may not use alternate courses or focus areas to market a single approved program as more than one program. It should be clear to students that the same credential will be obtained by completing the program regardless of chosen course configuration and that focus areas function as an elective choice facilitating specialty learning topics.

## General Education

The rules for creating focus areas via alternate courses exclude general education courses.

## Program Differentiation

While clear differentiation among various focus areas within a program is desired, colleges may not create a focus area so distinct that it might be considered its own, separate program. Furthermore, graduates from programs with distinct focus areas should not be placed in direct competition for the same positions as graduates from another program. Differentiation of focus areas should be established by the college and confirmed by the relevant WTCS Director. Focus area titles and course titles should give some indication of this differentiation.

**Example:** Industrial SMAW & FCAW (focus area 1) and Sheetmetal MIG & TIG (focus area 2) might exist within a welding program. Focus areas are titled in such a way as to indicate their specificity (different types and applications of welding) and course titles support this distinction.

### 10-621-1 Industrial Welding Technology (associate degree program)

<b>Focus Area 1: Industrial SMAW &amp; FCAW</b>	<b>Focus Area 2: Sheetmetal MIG &amp; TIG</b>
Primary Course	Alternate Course 1
Stick (SMAW) Welding	Gas Metal Arc/Metal Inert Gas (GMAW/MIG) Welding
Flux-Cored (FCAW) Welding	Gas Tungsten Arc/Tungsten Inert Gas (GTAW/TIG) Welding

## TSA Implications

Colleges must pay close attention to the courses in which program outcomes are assessed. If a program's primary course is one in which a program outcome is assessed, then any alternate course to the primary course must also assess the same program outcome.

### Example

In the example below, the curriculum contains 64 credits, of which 15 are general education (Function 6) and 49 are technical credits (Function 7). That means that no more than 30% of the 49 credits, or 14 credits, can have alternate courses. The curriculum in the example is in compliance, as 9 credits of the primary technical credits have alternates. The alternate courses make up two focus areas.

<b>Course Number</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Credits</b>	<b>Term</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Alternate 1 (Area of Focus: Office Management)</b>	<b>Alternate 2 (Area of Focus: Hospitality Management)</b>
10-890-101	College 101	1	1	7		
10-102-158	Business Principles	3	1	7		
10-801-136	English Composition 1	3	1	6		
10-801-196	Oral/Interpersonal Comm	3	1	6		
10-804-134	Mathematical Reasoning	3	1	6		
10-103-121	MS Word Intro	1	1	7		
10-105-100	Careers in Business	1	1	7		
10-104-110	Marketing Principles	3	2	7		
10-196-1XX	Manage & Lead People	3	2	7	10-106-1XX Office Management Course 1 (3 credits)	10-109-XXX Hospitality Management Course 1 (3 credits)
10-101-106	Accounting Principles	3	2	7		
10-809-195	Economics	3	2	6		
10-103-131	MS Excel Intro	1	2	7		
10-102-150	Business Law	3	2	7		
10-182-117	Principles of Lean Operations	1	3	7		
10-102-168	Operations Management	3	3	7		
10-101-184	Business Finance/Budgeting	3	3	7		
10-182-118	Lean Six Sigma Foundations	2	3	7		
10-196-191	Supervision	3	3	7	10-106-XXX Office Management Course 2 (3 credits)	10-109-1XX Hospitality Management Course 2 (3 credits)

<b>Course Number</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Credits</b>	<b>Term</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Alternate 1 (Area of Focus: Office Management)</b>	<b>Alternate 2 (Area of Focus: Hospitality Management)</b>
10-196-188	Project Management	1	3	7		
10-105-103	Career Fundamentals	1	3	7		
10-196-193	Human Resource Mgmt.	3	4	7		
10-102-160	Global Business Mgmt	3	4	7		
10-104-191	Customer Experience	3	4	7	10-106-1XX Office Management Course 3 (3 credits)	10-109-1XX Hospitality Management Course 3 (3 credits)
10-102-199	Bus Mgmt Career Experience	2	4	7		
10-196-1XX	Adv. Project Management	3	4	7		
10-809-198	Intro to Psychology	3	4	6		
10-102-195	Business Simulation	2	4	7		

## Curriculum Changes and Program Advisory Committees

Updated curricula, including those that use alternate courses to create focus areas, must be submitted to the WTCS CCP Portal for approval *prior to offering the new programming*. Prior to such submission, college program advisory committees must be notified of the proposed program changes and engaged to discuss them. Advisory committee feedback and support for the program changes must be documented in committee meeting minutes.\* Advisory committee support may also be demonstrated by electronic survey or emailed feedback and support responses.

\*Note that all advisory committees must convene at least once yearly and submit meeting minutes within 60 days of any such meeting to the WTCS at [Programs@wtcsystem.edu](mailto:Programs@wtcsystem.edu). For additional information regarding submission requirements please see ESM Chapter 19 Program Advisory Committees, Procedures subsection.

### *Required Documentation for Focus Areas*

Colleges are encouraged to track the use of focus areas in programs and monitor their effectiveness locally. Since focus areas are not separate WTCS credentials, the process for documenting their creation or modification is limited to:

- *Consultation with WTCS Director.* Must occur prior to the submission of new curriculum that will use focus area(s). Discuss focus area titles, courses and intent.
- *Submission of documented advisory committee support for the focus area(s),* emailed directly to the appropriate WTCS Director managing that program, with relevant information highlighted. Body of email must identify the impacted program by number and title, identify the focus area titles, describe the intended purpose of the focus area and list the included courses.

### *Alternate Course Approval and Curriculum Approval*

For information regarding how to submit course and curriculum files to the WTCS CCP Portal, please refer to the [WTCS CCP System Course Manual and WTCS CCP System Curriculum Manual on myWTCS](#). Note that all courses must be submitted and approved before any updated curriculum can be approved. **Alternate course requirements are found on page 16 of the WTCS CCPS Curriculum Manual**, Chapter 2 Record Submission Format, Curriculum Data Record (“A” Record) subsection.

Note that the curriculum data record positions 31-46, Alternate Course Number, are reserved for recording up to two courses that may be substituted for the primary course in the curriculum.

- Courses with Aid Code 20 can only be used as alternate courses in a curriculum.
- The alternate courses must be numeric.
- **There is a limit of two alternate courses for a single primary course.**
- Leave Alternate Course Number blank if there is no alternate course.

### *Assignment of data record positions when documenting alternate courses:*

#### Alternate Course 1

- 31-38 Alternate Course Number 1
- 31-32 Course Aid Code (of the Alternate Course 1)
- 33-35 Instructional Area Number (of the Alternate Course 1)
- 36-38 Course Sequence Number (of the Alternate Course 1)

#### Alternate Course 2

- 39-46 Alternate Course Number 2

- 39-40 Course Aid Code (Alternate Course Number 2)
- 41-43 Instructional Area Number (of the Alternate Course 2)
- 44-46 Course Sequence Number (of the Alternate Course 2)

### Financial Aid Implications

Consult with the college financial aid office to determine whether the use of alternate courses and focus areas within a program curriculum will impact student financial aid eligibility. Additional resources regarding financial aid are available on the [myWTCS website](#).

### Credential Awarding

Awarding of a program credential occurs upon successful completion of all program coursework and outcomes by the student. Student decisions to complete primary versus alternate courses or focus areas does not impact the type nor title of the credential awarded.

## Suggested Focus Area Development Process

This section provides a suggested framework for colleges to work through the creation of focus areas. Local processes may vary.

### 1. Determine need and impact.

- a. Will this focus area benefit both students and industry?
- b. Does industry support these program developments? What input did you gather from the program's advisory committee? Document advisory committee discussion and support (will email to WTCS Director when submitting the new curriculum).
- c. Do these developments maintain and not alter program outcomes and intended job outcomes?
- d. How will the college deliver these new courses? Are additional staff needed? How will this impact program operational costs? Will program sustainability be impacted by the inclusion of alternate courses?
- e. Did you consult with the college financial aid office to determine whether the use of alternate courses and focus area(s) will impact student financial aid eligibility?
- f. Did you consult with the college registrar's office to determine if and how focus area(s) will be documented on student records?
- g. What title(s) might be appropriate for the proposed focus area(s)?
- h. Did you consult with the program's WTCS Director? Note: WTCS Director consultation may be done at any time prior to college submission in the CCP Portal of new curricula with focus areas added, though early consultation may speed college decision-making during focus area development.

### 2. Determine maximum alternate course credit percentage.

- a. How many total credits within the program curriculum are designated as technical, occupational-specific and advanced technical studies?
- b. Multiply this total by 0.30 (30%) to arrive at the maximum credit amount of allowable alternate courses. If partial, credit value must be rounded down to the nearest whole number.

### 3. Determine alternate course sequencing.

- a. How many alternate courses might provide the desired specificity and differentiation of programming for each focus area?
- b. What are appropriate alternate course titles and credit values?

### 4. Determine appropriateness of alternate courses and focus areas. Alternate courses must not disrupt successful program completion.

- a. If students elect to take the alternate courses, will they be as equally prepared to meet program outcomes, technical skills attainment (TSA) and intended job outcomes as those students who take *only* primary courses?
- 5. Determine that program differentiation and non-competition are maintained with use of alternate courses and focus areas.**
  - a. Do alternate courses or focus areas create cross-program graduate competition, meaning that graduates of a single college's programs might compete with one another for the same jobs? This is not allowed.
  - b. Do alternate courses create a new program or different intended job outcomes? This is not allowed.
- 6. Determine alternate course credit value meets credential credit range requirements.**
  - a. Do alternate course credit amounts differ from primary course credits?
  - b. Do alternate course credit totals for all individual focus areas fall within the credential type's minimum and maximum credit range? If a student were to take any individual focus area, would the student graduate with sufficient course credits to meet the minimum required credits and not exceed the maximum credits allowed within that credential type?
- 7. Determine assignment of alternates to primary courses.**
  - a. Which primary courses are appropriate choices for the assignment of alternates?
  - b. If students do not take these primary courses, will this change the credential earned, the program outcomes attained, the intended jobs and/or the overall skill and employability of the student?
  - c. In which primary courses are program outcomes assessed? If using a primary course that assesses a program outcome, any associated alternate courses must also assess that specific outcome. Alternatively, the college could consider choosing a primary course without program outcome assessment to build a focus area or review primary courses and potentially reassign program outcome assessment.