UTAH SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

ISSUE BRIEF

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Technical education vs. Career & Technical Education within the Utah System of Higher Education

The Utah Legislature recently passed legislation, which merged the Utah System of Technical Colleges with what was the Utah System of Higher Education.[1] The new Utah System of Higher Education includes eight technical colleges, two community colleges, four regional universities, and two research universities. These sixteen institutions are categorized into three defined institutional roles: technical colleges, degree-granting institutions, and degree-granting institutions with a technical college role.[2]

The institution's assigned role will determine the types of programs it will offer. By statute, there are three programing categories: technical education, Career and Technical Education, and academic education.

Academic education is a general category that comprises all programing offered by degree-granting institutions. It includes coursework that leads to certificates or degrees ranging from associate degrees to doctorates. Understanding the difference and purpose of CTE and technical education, as well as which institutions provide which program type, requires additional explanation that is outlined below.

Technical Education

Technical education programs focus on providing knowledge and skills aligned with industry demand and do not require students to take general education coursework.[3] Technical education includes short-term training and programs that:

- lead to an institutional certificate; or
- is short-term training; and
- does not include general education; and
- is offered at low cost to adult learners and no cost to secondary students.

[1] Utah State Legislature, *S.B. 111, Higher Education Amendments*, https://le.utah.gov/~2020/bills/static/SB0111.html
[2] Utah System of Higher Education, *Roles and Missions of Institutions*, https://ushe.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/agendas/20200821/TAB_G.pdf
[3] Utah System of Higher Education, *General education: Ensuring Utah's citizens have the essential skills needed to succeed*, https://ushe.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/reports/issue_brief/Gen-ed_IB_final.pdf

Although technical education does not require general education, both academic competencies and occupational skills are integrated into the coursework required for each program. For example, a technical education manufacturing program may include instruction in applied math and science as they apply to the technical skills required for the occupation. The instruction in each program is determined by occupational advisory committees that evaluate the program annually to ensure alignment with current and relevant industry practices. This helps to ensure that graduates have the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in industry.

The following technical colleges are statutorily authorized to offer technical education within their designated region:

- Bridgerland Technical College
- Davis Technical College
- Dixie Technical College
- Mountainland Technical College
- Ogden-Weber Technical College
- Southwest Technical College
- Tooele Technical College
- Uintah Basin Technical College

In addition to the eight technical colleges, the Legislature authorized the following degree-granting institutions to offer technical education within regions that do not have a technical college:

- Utah State University; Eastern, Blanding, and Moab campuses
- Salt Lake Community College
- Snow College

These are the only degree-granting institutions that may offer technical education.

Career and Technical Education

Career and Technical Education includes courses and programs that make up technical education, combined with general education, resulting in certificates and degrees. CTE includes courses and programs that:

- are designed to meet industry needs; and
- lead to a certificate or a degree; and
- may qualify for funding under the Carl D. Perkins Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act;[4] and
- includes general education requirements.

[4] Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, *Perkins V*, *https://cte.ed.gov/legislation/perkins-v*

CTE courses provide "students of all ages with the academic and technical skills, knowledge, and training necessary to succeed in future careers and to become lifelong learners."[5] CTE courses and programs are available at the following public colleges and universities within Utah:

- Salt Lake Community College
- Snow College
- Utah State University
- Southern Utah University
- Weber State University
- Utah Valley University
- Dixie State University

How technical education and CTE fit together to create seamless pathways

Though CTE and technical education differ, there is overlap. Technical education is available to students at little to no cost, enabling students to acquire industry-ready skills and employability without accumulating student debt. Additionally, technical education focuses on the technical and related skills needed to enter and succeed in industry via the most efficient and economical pathway possible. In contrast, CTE builds on the foundation of technical education, providing additional general education courses and coursework designed to enhance skill development and promotion within the industry.

Because technical education is a component of CTE, it can also be articulated to create a seamless pathway between secondary institutions, technical colleges, and degree-granting institutions. A major benefit of having all public community colleges, universities, and technical colleges in the same System is the increased ease of articulation of programming between institutions—meaning that program courses are both transferable and applicable to satisfy specific credential requirements across institutions. Moreover, seamless articulation and the ability of dual-enrolled secondary students to earn college credit through Concurrent Enrollment reduces students' risk of unnecessarily repeating similar courses, saving students both time and money on their way to graduation.

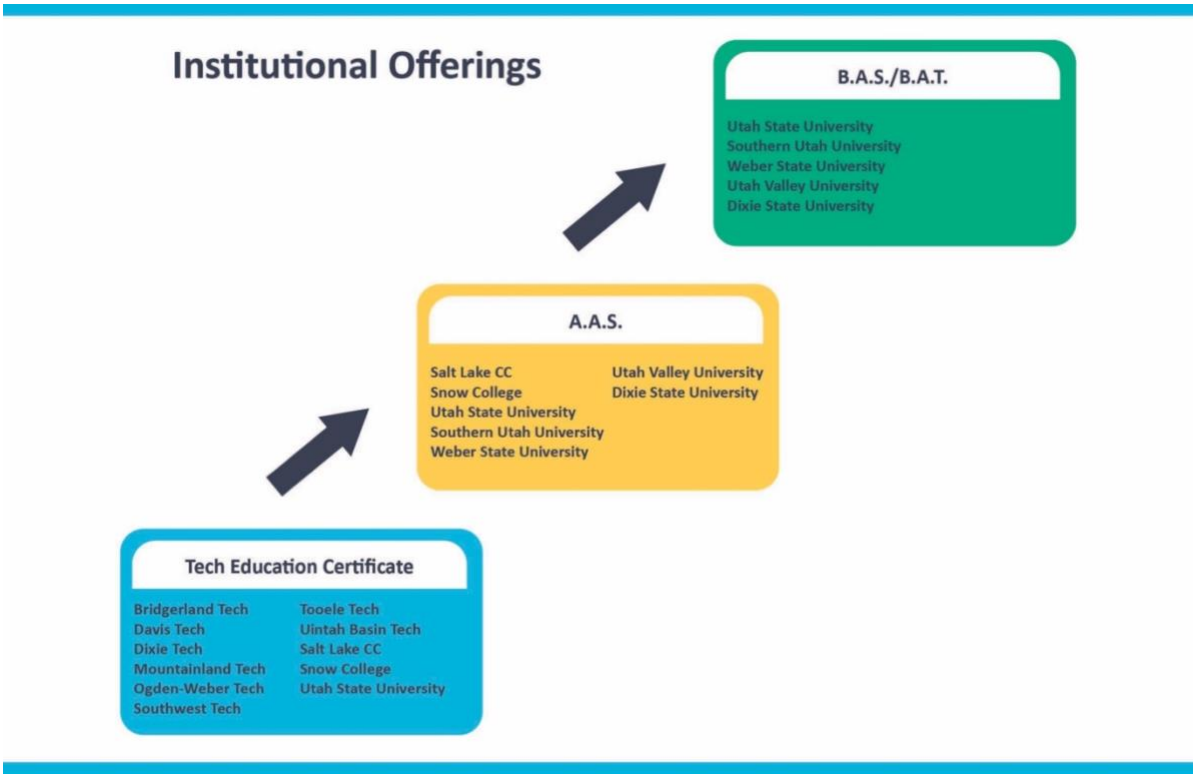
Ideally, all technical pathways, whether they are technical education or CTE, are designed as stackable programs that allow students to achieve several meaningful milestones along the way to their final educational goal. If students collect and use credentials that build from one to another, students can gain experience, increase earnings, and minimize debt. Typically, each step up means more responsibility, wage increases, and other benefits. This approach is "vertical credential stacking."[6] These streamlined pathways work to remove educational cul-de-sacs, which are created when programs are not aligned

[5] Advance CTE, *About CTE,* https://careertech.org/CTE
[6] Inside Higher Ed, *Making Credentials Matter*, https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/05/23/understanding-differences-what-credentials-are-being-stacked-and-why-essay

between institutions, and previous coursework is not rewarded, causing students to repeat courses or accrue excess credits.

Additionally, stackable credentials increase the likelihood that students have acquired meaningful skills, allowing students to work in their field while continuing their education.[7] Institutional offerings are designed to follow a pathway originating with technical education credentials, leading to CTE credentials, and culminating in a bachelor's degree or higher. The multi-award design provides "on-ramps and off-ramps" for students to stop out of school and start again without losing the credentials they have already acquired.[8]

Students who have earned institutional and, if applicable, industry credentials are more employable. Once in the workforce, students can more easily transition from secondary to postsecondary education, often with a livable income and sometimes with tuition assistance.



[7] Inside Higher Ed, *Making Credentials Matter*, https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/05/23/understanding-differences-what-credentials-are-being-stacked-and-why-essay

[8] Inside Higher Ed, *On-Ramps and Off-Ramps*, https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/media/IHE-On-Ramps-and-Off-Ramps-Alternative-Credentials-Preview.pdf?utm_source=mailchimp&utm_campaign=0300c2c2e1f0&utm_medium=page

In Utah, students can now identify a pathway, originating at any one of our 16 institutions, with the confidence there will be a path forward. The new combined System will enhance the transferability between institutions and ensure intelligent pathway design, which will reduce time to completion, the cost to the student, and increase the pipeline of qualified students into the workforce.