

Iowa Community College Work-Based Learning State Initiative



Current State

As of May 1, 2021, there are 181 active work-based learning (WBL) courses adopted in the state's common course number system (CCN). In addition, but much harder to track, are a minimum of 1065 other active work-based learning courses in the CCN system across more than 80 prefix disciplines in the content areas of program internships, clinicals, career exploration, practicums and field or related experiences. This high level of variation among CC's creates a number of issues for planning, launching and communicating the benefits of valuable WBL programs in the state.

IDOE Contacts

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WBL Course Initiative Benefits

The WBL initiative aims to increase state-wide opportunities and ease of setting up work-based learning experiences with community college and high school students by creating a set of community college courses that promote a greater understanding of careers and the workplace and reinforce technical skills through work-based learning experiences reinforced by classroom curriculum. A few of the community college system benefits include:

- Increasing the **capacity** of community colleges to provide work-based learning experiences to students, including high school students across all Iowa regions.
- Improving **alignment** of WBL course types between secondary and postsecondary levels and easily identifying advanced levels of experience across the WBL spectrum.
- Improving **communication with stakeholders**, including our business and industry partners, with clear information about the type of experience and the area of the experience the student has had within WBL
- Using relevant, modern and **uniform terminology** for this work helps with understanding across diverse audiences.
- Using these courses as part of the **Guided Pathways onboarding** to help all students (secondary and post-secondary) get into the right education pathway and reduce loss of credits.
- **Leveraging existing policy structures**, including concurrent enrollment and the Intermediary Networks based on how the courses are built to meet requirements.
- Promoting greater **consistency in the delivery** of work-based learning experiences.
- **Collecting data consistently** and through a common understanding of WBL course offerings among college faculty and intermediary staff through the use of a CCN system.
- **Reporting** WBL students' experiences more reliably and frequently statewide to help with legislative questions, funding and grant opportunities.
- Building a **WBL brand** across all community colleges as part of broader WBL state effort:
 - Employers, associations, legislators and other stakeholders will better understand and be informed by this familiar college classification system.
 - The use of a consistent, industry-approved employability skills and workplace essentials curriculum is a fantastic and huge value for students.
 - Opens up partnering with the Iowa Association of Business and Industry (ABI), the Iowa Business Council (IBC) and others to offer courses to better prepare students for work
- Building consistency of course numbers can help **guarantee college credit is earned** for WBL programs like apprenticeships, which unfortunately sometimes does not occur due to misunderstandings or miscommunication. The system allows one to quickly and easily tell that a Department-approved WBL course is included in the related technical instruction portion of an apprenticeship program.



WBL FAQ

Q: How should we address programs with accreditation requirements which may not allow quick course changes?
Many of these happen to be in the healthcare fields.

A: These programs can be addressed later in the conversation and by bringing stakeholders together to discuss options to meet program requirements.

Q: Several long standing work-based learning courses are established in programs and working already. Why change what is already working well?

A: See the benefits described above in terms of communication, data collection and reporting and course availability and consistency across the state.

Q: For the WBL200 and WBL300 courses which have sector cluster specific courses (e.g. “information solutions”) but not program discipline specific courses (e.g. “computer programming”), how will they allow a student to get credit for their particular program?

A: Indication of the particular program on the transcript may be desired for the college to award credit for WBL in that particular program (e.g. include the specific IT experience (programming) in the title or syllabus or concerns can be addressed by the steering committee if required).

Q: How do colleges address the internal challenges of changing catalogs, websites, promotional materials, etc.?

A: Building these courses into programs does take time and the action team can recommend best practices for local college implementation.

Q: Will any WBL courses lose specific career identity going from a discipline specific course number to a general WBL number (i.e. WEL 108 → WBL 108)? If the course becomes too generalized, will it still be beneficial or relatable to specific programs and taught by others than the subject matter experts?

A: The specific content of the courses (beyond the basics) is still up to the colleges as well as the faculty hired to teach the specific courses. If a course is intended locally for welding students, the content of the WBL108: Exploring Careers Industrial Technology can be tailored to that program or expanded to all industrial technology students at the college. That particular course might best be taught by the industrial technology faculty.

Q: Do the WBL courses lead to the old 60’s era practice of tracking students earlier? Would internships in college programs be encouraged too early for high school students rather than the foundational experiences of career exploration and job shadowing?

A: Colleges decide what level of WBL courses make sense for their college programs within each term of the program. Most colleges appear to be offering the advanced WBL courses for sophomore-level students who have mastered introductory program material instead of to concurrent students.

Q: How does the transfer of WBL courses to four-year institutions currently work?

A: Unfortunately, there are not a lot of WBL courses that yet transfer course-for-course at the four-year college and university level. However, having the WBL courses available consistently across the state makes the conversation easier with these higher education partners, and WBL course offerings have been a part of the transfer major articulation discussion for some disciplines.

Conclusion

There is strengthened and renewed interest, attention, and resources for WBL at both a national and state level as our economy opens back up following the pandemic. This includes new support from areas or programs like Perkins V, USDOL Quality Pre-apprenticeships and Future Ready Iowa. Employers and educators are looking for ways to further collaborate to safely and efficiently train their workforce in Iowa, and the community colleges have the potential and capacity to fill this need through a wide range of new or expanded WBL programs and opportunities now and well into the future.