Bachelor of Applied Science-Reduced Credit

Guidance for Program Identification, Design, Implementation, and Assessment

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Purpose

The Bachelor of Applied Science-Reduced Credit (BASRC) gives institutions the opportunity to create focused bachelor's degree pathways that meet high-demand workforce needs. It offers an academically rigorous, career-focused route, with a curriculum intentionally built around the competencies graduates need for clearly identified occupations.

The framework is organized around the long-standing instructional design principles of Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. Although the guidance is presented sequentially, the five phases form a continuous improvement cycle. Evidence collected during implementation and evaluation should inform reassessments of workforce needs, competencies, curricular offerings, assessment, and program delivery methods.

Part I guidance is intended to help institutions analyze and establish the workforce-related need for the BASRC. The analysis elements should provide evidence to either support the development of an initial prospectus or identify gaps that should be addressed before the prospectus is developed.

Part 1: Analyzing the Need

Guiding Principles

1. Intentional Design

The BASRC's intention is not to redesign an existing bachelor's degree but to create a workforce-focused degree. Institutions should use backward design principles, starting with high-demand occupations where a bachelor's degree is the typical education level and identifying the competencies graduates need. The curriculum should then focus on topics and authentic learning activities that help students develop and demonstrate those competencies. While most BASRC programs are ideally 90-96 credits, the appropriate number of credits should result from intentional program design rather than serve as the starting point for program reduction.

2. Competency Driven

As in competency-based education, the curriculum should be built around a clearly defined set of competencies aligned with the occupations the degree is designed to serve. These competencies should guide:

- Program learning outcomes;
- Course content
- Sequencing and prerequisites;
- Applied learning;
- Assessment; and
- Continuous improvement.

3. Employer Informed

Employers are key partners throughout the analysis, design, implementation, and evaluation of a BASRC program. Employers and industry partners can provide important evidence regarding:

- Current workforce requirements;
- Competencies expected of graduates;
- Emerging skill needs;
- Appropriate applied-learning experiences;
- Internships, endorsements, and sponsorships; and
- The continuing relevance of the curriculum.

Employer participation therefore should not be viewed solely as evidence to support initial program approval.

4. Academic Rigor

Although the BASRC requires fewer credits than a traditional bachelor's degree, it should still uphold academic rigor. By aligning competencies with the curriculum, the program provides students with a tailored mix of general education and discipline-specific coursework. In addition, requiring at least one-third of degree credits be in the upper division ensures higher-order cognitive demands. In short, it is not just a matter of what students take, but how they demonstrate what they have learned after completing the degree.

Analyzing the Need

The analysis phase establishes why the program should exist, the students it is intended to serve, the workforce competencies it should address, and whether the institution has sufficient capacity to support it.

Workforce Demand

Using tools from the Education and Workforce Hub, your institution should begin by clearly defining the workforce need. Hub dashboards such as MEDLI and High Demand Alignment, along with the Institutional Service Area Tool, are a good place to start. When exploring workforce needs, your analysis should identify:

- Targeted workforce and career areas;
- Relevant Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code(s);
- Applicability to the state or regional High Demand Career Lists;
- Current employment;
- Projected employment;
- Wages;
- Education level required to enter the identified occupations; and
- Regional and/or statewide demand.

At this stage of the process, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What occupations will graduates be prepared to enter?
2. What evidence demonstrates demand for those occupations?
3. Is the demand local, regional, or statewide?
4. Is a bachelor's degree the typical education level required for entry into the workforce?

Before completing the workforce analysis, use the CIP Selector Tool to identify the CIP code that aligns with the SOC code and best represents the proposed degree program. Because a single CIP may relate to multiple occupations and an occupation may draw graduates from multiple fields of study, institutions should use the CIP-SOC relationship as an analytical starting point rather than assume a one-to-one correspondence.

Target Student Population

After identifying a workforce area, consider which students the program is designed to serve. This will help determine whether the degree is viable in terms of potential enrollment and help identify support systems needed to properly advise students seeking the degree.

Consider the following:

- Students' expected educational preparation;
- Prior learning credit for previous postsecondary education, relevant work experience, and military experience;
- Potential transfer pathways;

- Employer needs for upskilling their workforce;
- Student career objectives; and
- Characteristics necessary for success.

The Education and Workforce Hub tools, such as the Institutional Service Area and the USG-TCSG Alignment dashboard, can help identify potential pipelines.

At this stage of the process, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. Who are the students this program is intended to serve?
2. What are likely entry pathways into the program?
3. What prior learning experiences are students likely to bring?
4. Why is this program appropriate for the potential student population?
5. What students might be better served by a traditional bachelor's degree program?
6. What will prospective students need to understand to make an informed choice between the BASRC and other bachelor's degree programs/

Employer and Industry Engagement

At this stage, the Institutional Service Areas tool can help you identify employers within your institution's local workforce development area and regional commission. Consider reaching out to employers most likely to hire these students and asking for help identifying and refining the competencies students need to succeed in the workplace after graduation. Once you are ready to approach employers, you can use the Workforce Competency Tool from the Education & Workforce Hub to generate a list of O*NET competencies for the SOC code. It may also be helpful at this point to use available AI tools to analyze the list of O*NET competencies. Doing so can help the AI tool generate additional, up-to-date competencies based on current advertised job postings and eliminate those that are out-of-date due to delays in O*NET updates.

Institutional Capacity

A critical part of the analysis is to determine whether your institution has sufficient capacity to develop and sustain the proposed program.

You should be able to answer the following questions:

1. Does the proposed program align with the institutional mission, academic portfolio, and strategic priorities?
2. Is there appropriate faculty expertise to support the proposed field of study and delivery of content related to the workforce competencies?
3. What resources exist or are needed to support the program?

4. What additional academic resources might be required?
5. If internships are part of the program, will additional personnel be needed to support and supervise students?
6. Are employer and industry partnerships available to support competency validation, applied learning, and continued program review to ensure that the program remains current?
7. Does the program have sufficient student-support capacity?
8. Can the curriculum be offered in a sequence that supports timely student progression?
9. Are there any resource gaps that must be addressed before implementing the program?

Decision Point:

Before proceeding to the program design phase, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- Does the evidence demonstrate a clear workforce need, sufficient student enrollment, and interested employers?
- Does the institution have the resources and personnel to support the program?

If both answers are yes, review the prospectus and submit it for approval before moving on to additional phases. If the answer is unclear, you may need to conduct additional analysis or reconsider the proposed program before moving forward.