



Blanket Waiver Request for Bachelor of Applied Sciences Degrees

Executive Summary

The Colorado Community College System (CCCS) respectfully requests a blanket waiver from standard gtPathways general education requirements for Bachelor of Applied Sciences (BAS) degree programs. This request is grounded in the fundamental distinction between applied baccalaureate degrees and traditional transfer-oriented programs, the unique workforce development mission of BAS degrees, and the critical need to maintain industry-relevant curriculum that directly serves Colorado's economic development goals.

CCHE Policy Overview: Section 7.00 General Education and gtPathways Curriculum

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) Policy Section 7.00 establishes the gtPathways curriculum as Colorado's guaranteed transfer general education program. Key provisions include:

- **Minimum Requirements:** All bachelor's degree programs must include 31 credit hours of gtPathways-approved general education courses
- **Distribution Requirements:** Credits must be distributed across five content areas: Communication, Mathematics, Arts & Humanities, History, and Social & Behavioral Sciences
- **Transfer Guarantee:** gtPathways courses are guaranteed to transfer among all Colorado public institutions of higher education
- **Quality Assurance:** Courses must meet specific competency standards and undergo rigorous review processes

HLC Assumed Practices on General Education

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC), as the regional accreditor for CCCS institutions, maintains Assumed Practices that establish baseline expectations for all accredited institutions. Regarding general education, HLC's Assumed Practices require:

- **Bachelor's Degree Programs:** Institutions must require at least 30 semester credits (or equivalent) of general education coursework. Any variation is explained and justified.



COLORADO

COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

- **Breadth of Learning:** General education must include exposure to broad areas of learning including humanities, sciences, mathematics, and social sciences
- **Intellectual Skills Development:** Programs must develop students' intellectual inquiry skills, including critical thinking, communication, and quantitative reasoning
- **Integration with Major:** General education should complement and enhance the major field of study
- **Assessment:** Institutions must assess general education outcomes and use results for improvement

Important Note: HLC's Board of Trustees adopted revisions to the Assumed Practices in June 2024, which will take effect September 1, 2025. Current practices remain in effect until that date, and institutions should monitor these changes for potential impacts on BAS program design.

Historical Context and Legislative Intent

The gtPathways program emerged from House Bill 01-1298 (2001), which mandated the creation of a statewide guaranteed transfer program. The statute's primary objectives were to:

- Facilitate seamless transfer between institutions
- Reduce time-to-degree for transfer students
- Minimize credit loss during institutional transitions
- Standardize general education expectations across Colorado

However, this framework was designed primarily for traditional Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science programs, predating the widespread emergence of applied baccalaureate degrees designed to meet specific workforce needs.

The Case for BAS Degree Waiver

1. Fundamental Distinction in Purpose and Design

BAS degrees are inherently different from traditional baccalaureate programs:

- **Applied Focus:** BAS programs emphasize practical, hands-on learning directly applicable to specific career fields
- **Stackable Credentials:** These degrees build upon Associate of Applied Science (AAS) foundations, creating clear pathways from technical education to advanced professional practice



- **Industry Partnership:** Curriculum is developed in close collaboration with industry partners to ensure immediate workplace relevance

2. Non-Competitive Nature with Transfer Programs

BAS degrees serve a distinct student population and purpose:

- Target working professionals seeking career advancement
- Focus on post-traditional students unable to pursue traditional four-year programs
- Address specific workforce shortages in technical and applied fields
- Do not compete with BA/BS programs at four-year institutions for transfer students

3. Industry Workforce Development Imperatives

Colorado's economic competitiveness depends on producing graduates with immediately applicable skills:

- **Skills Gap:** Employers consistently report difficulty finding workers with specific technical competencies
- **Rapid Industry Evolution:** Technology and industry practices change faster than traditional curriculum revision cycles
- **Limited Credit Hours:** Requiring 31 credits of general education in a 120-credit program significantly reduces space for essential technical content
- **Return on Investment:** Students and employers expect BAS programs to deliver direct career benefits

Proposed Hybrid Models for Consideration

While requesting a blanket waiver, CCCS recognizes the value of general education and proposes the following hybrid approaches:

Model 1: Integrated Competency Approach

- Embed essential gtPathways competencies within technical courses
- Example: Technical writing requirements satisfied through industry-specific documentation courses
 - Maintains learning outcomes while maximizing relevance



COLORADO

COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Model 2: Reduced and Targeted Requirement

- Require 15-18 credits of gtPathways courses most relevant to the field
- Allow programs to select from specific gtPathways categories aligned with industry needs in alignment with accreditation standards
- Preserve some breadth while prioritizing depth

Model 3: Industry-Validated Alternative

- Develop industry-specific general education courses that meet gtPathways learning outcomes
- Create sector-specific communication, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking courses
- Submit for gtPathways approval with industry endorsement

Conclusion and Recommendation

The Colorado Community College System's request for a blanket waiver for BAS degrees represents a critical investment in Colorado's workforce development infrastructure. These programs serve unique populations, address specific economic needs, and operate under fundamentally different educational paradigms than traditional transfer programs.

Granting this waiver will:

- Enhance Colorado's economic competitiveness
- Provide clear pathways for technical workers to advance their careers
- Maintain the integrity of both applied and traditional degree pathways
- Allow institutions to respond nimbly to evolving workforce needs
- Support innovation in credentials to support the modern learner

We respectfully urge the Commission to recognize the distinct nature and critical importance of BAS degrees by granting this waiver, thereby enabling CCCS to fulfill its mission of preparing Colorado's workforce for the demands of the 21st-century economy.