Changing Program and Course Codes

California Community Colleges use several coding taxonomies to identify and categorize courses, certificates, and degrees. However, the correlation between courses and awards may be challenging to understand because courses often serve a variety of purposes, there is no guarantee that similar courses at different colleges serve the same purpose, and the purposes evolve as careers and society change. Nonetheless, it is to the benefit of colleges and the system as a whole to improve consistency where possible to improve student success. But before changing a code to improve data accuracy, it's important to determine how the change will affect students, funding, college planning, and accountability reporting.

Reasons to change a code

There are three reasons to consider changing a code. The first is to correct inadvertent coding errors. The second is to review codes and the associated course or award content, to ensure that the original codes are still valid and applicable. The third is that periodically, changes are made to coding taxonomies, which means that code assignments will need to be updated.

Types of codes

There are three primary coding systems that colleges use for courses, certificates, and degrees:

- Taxonomy of Program (TOP): used by California Community Colleges to correlate the content of each course, certificate, and degree with subject areas

- Standard Accountability Measure (SAM): specific to California community colleges, SAM codes indicate whether courses are vocational and document progression within a program

- Classification of Instructional Program (CIP): focused on certificates and degrees, CIP codes are used by other states, the federal government, and the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)

A crosswalk of TOP to CIP codes is used by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office for reporting to the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Colleges may use this crosswalk, or their own assessment of appropriate CIP codes, to comply with reporting requirements for federal financial aid, veterans programs, gainful employment, and accreditation.

Things to consider before changing a code

Course and program codes help colleges with many activities, which means that colleges need to determine the impact of changes before going forward with any adjustments.

- State Funding: TOP and SAM codes with a vocational flag are used to determine which programs to include in funding calculations for Perkins, the Strong Workforce Program, and

Career Development and College Preparation (CDCP). Funding could decrease if course, certificate, or degree codes are changed so that they are no longer assigned to a vocational SAM code or TOP code. Furthermore, introductory courses (coded as SAM D) are not included in some metrics associated with Perkins and Strong Workforce Program funding, so changes to SAM code levels may affect funding.

- Federal Financial Aid and Veterans Programs: Colleges record which program students are enrolled in using CIP codes. If the TOP or CIP code associated with a degree or certificate is changing, alert federal agencies that your college is implementing a code improvement effort and determine whether any action is needed to ensure students can keep their funding.

- Federal Accountability: Program-level outcomes, using CIP codes, are reported through publicly-available sites such as gainful employment reports and the IPEDS. If the TOP or CIP code associated with a degree or certificate is changing, alert federal agencies that your college is implementing a code improvement effort and determine whether any action is needed to explain the shift.

- State Accountability: TOP codes are used to calculate program-level outcomes, which are posted on statewide tools such as Data Mart, the Student Success Scorecard, and the LaunchBoard, and used in evaluating initiatives that are focused on specific disciplines. If course, certificate, or degree codes change, be prepared to explain why there are shifts in student progress and outcomes. Furthermore, skills-builder metrics are based on students taking non-introductory CTE courses, so the level of SAM codes assigned to courses will affect skills-builders calculations.

- Accreditation: ACCJC uses CIP codes to determine the content of programs. If changes are made to TOP or CIP codes at the certificate or degree level, notify ACCJC that these changes are adjustments to reflect current content, and are not a substantive change in program offerings.

- Associate Degrees for Transfer: TOP codes for ADT awards are predetermined because they are associated with transfer model curricula, and cannot be changed by colleges.

- Instructional and Equipment Planning: Colleges may use TOP codes to determine groupings of courses, certificates, and degrees to include in program review and hiring (but TOP codes should not be used to determine minimum qualifications). If course, certificate, or degree TOP codes will be changed, or if the code review process triggers changes to curriculum, check with institutional researchers, deans, and the local academic senate to see how this will affect instructional planning activities

- *Facilitates Planning*: Enrollments by TOP code are used in calculating space needs as part of the FUSION planning system. If course, certificate, or degree codes will be changed such that they are no longer in the same TOP2 or TOP4 category, check with facilities managers on campus to see how this will affect projections.

How do codes get changed?

TOP and SAM codes are designated by colleges and reported to the Curriculum Inventory and separately through uploads to the Chancellor's Office Management Information System (MIS). CIP codes may either be designated by the Chancellor's Office (in the case of IPEDS reporting) or by colleges. Each college has established its own process for making changes to the Curriculum Inventory and to their local data systems (which generates the MIS reports). Please contact your local curriculum chair and your institutional researcher for more information on this process.

- Course Codes: With the deployment of the new Chancellor's Office Curriculum Inventory (COCI) in 2017, colleges are able to make changes to course TOP and SAM codes without going through a Chancellor's Office review process. A new course control number will be assigned automatically. Colleges should keep a record of the relationship between old control numbers and new numbers to be able to track course outcomes over time.

- Award Codes: Changes to TOP codes associated with certificates and degrees (referred to as program codes) still need to be submitted to the Chancellor's Office for review. More information on this process is available here: http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/AcademicAffairs/CurriculumandInstructionUnit/Curriculum.aspx

- CIP Codes: CIP codes that are locally assigned can be changed at the college's discretion. Please check with the various parties that use CIP codes (financial aid, veterans programs, gainful employment reporting, accreditation) regarding implementing new codes.

- TOP-CIP Crosswalk: The Chancellor's Office will be reviewing the TOP-CIP crosswalk, using feedback from colleges that is gathered through CTE Data Unlocked and the Code Alignment Project.

How can I get help reviewing codes?

The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, working with the Chancellor's Office and CTE Data Unlocked, have launched a project to support the review of codes that have been assigned to courses and awards. Participation is voluntary, with colleges and districts being served on a first-come, first-served basis, any time before the end of the 2017-18 academic year.

The Code Alignment Project is a faculty-led process for examining the reporting codes (TOP, CIP, SOC, and SAM) that have been assigned to CTE courses and program awards, to ensure that they appropriately match the content of the curriculum. When codes are accurately assigned, colleges are better able to implement degree audit systems, can avoid inconsistencies in federal reporting, and see data that are consistent with similar programs in tools like Salary Surfer, Data Mart, and the LaunchBoard.

For more information on the Code Alignment Project, visit:
http://doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/LaunchBoard/CodeAlignment.aspx