

Health and Public Safety Division Program Overview

Medical Coding Specialist Program

Congratulations on your decision to pursue a degree as a Medical Coding Specialist. This is an excellent profession to pursue, worth the hard work that the educational process requires. As part of the admission process for this program, you are required to read through the material presented on this website. Please be aware that you must read ALL of the material, complete the required forms, and return to Enrollment Services at Western (address on form) in order to meet the requirement of completing the mandatory program overview.

The Medical Coding Specialist technical diploma may be completed in partial fulfillment of the Health Information Technology (HIT) associate degree. A Medical Coding Specialist is an expert in assigning codes to diagnoses and procedures found in a patient's health record. The codes are used to compile research indexes and are reported to insurance companies or the government, who pay for the patient's medical expenses. Coding professionals increase the accuracy and timeliness of reimbursement and reduce the potential for delayed payments that can lead to fraud and abuse regulations. The primary focus is on the health sciences and coding. HIT graduates are also trained as coders in addition to other functions involved in the management of patient information. This is a technical diploma program.

*The admission requirements are subject to change without notice. This website will be updated at minimum on October 15 and February 15 of each year.

The Admission Process

Review the [Intent to Enroll](#) form to identify and complete the admission requirement for your program:

Step I – Application to the College

1. **Application to the College** Complete and submit the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) application. If you are interested in more than one program, you must complete an application for each program. A one-time \$30.00 application fee payable to Western must be submitted with the application. Applications are available in Enrollment Services at Western's Welcome Center, or at any regional learning center. The WTCS application can also be obtained online at <http://www.westerntc.edu/admissions>.
2. Submit **official transcripts** from high school and, if applicable, college. If submitting college transcripts, it is possible that you may have taken courses that can be applied towards your chosen program. To have your transcript evaluated for transfer of credit, complete and submit the form found at <http://www.westerntc.edu/transfer>.
3. **Placement tests** (COMPASS, ASSET, or ACT). You are required to take a placement test and meet the minimum scores unless the following applies:
 - If you have a bachelor's or master's degree, you are not required to take a placement test.
 - If you have successfully completed (C grade or better) college level Written Communication or Beginning Composition, you are not required to take the Writing placement test.
 - If you have successfully completed (C grade or better) college level Basic Math or College Mathematics, you are not required to take the Math placement test.

Satisfactory placement scores for the Medical Coding program can be obtained online at:

http://www.westerntc.edu/programs/program.aspx?PROGRAM_NBR=305302 under Admission Requirements.

Testing is available in La Crosse at the Western Technical College Campus Assessment Center or at the regional learning center sites in Independence, Black River Falls, Tomah, Mauston, or Viroqua. For more information on placement tests, visit the assessment website at <http://www.westerntc.edu/admissions/assessment.asp>. If you take the

placement test at another location, you must request that your scores be sent to Western.

Remediation courses are available for you if you do not meet the placement scores for the program. Students must retest after remediation. All remediation coursework must be completed prior to being accepted into the program.

Step II – Application to the Program

1. Review the **Online Program Overview** (this document). You must complete the [Intent to Enroll](#) form when you are prepared to begin your program of choice. Review the form to identify and complete the admission requirements specific to your program. You may send the completed requirements, as they are fulfilled, to Enrollment Services, located at the Welcome Center, however, **do not** mail in the Intent to Enroll form. The Intent to Enroll form will be submitted at your *mandatory* Enrollment Services Advisor meeting. Maintain and fill in the Intent to Enroll form as every requirement is submitted or attach the completed requirement/s to the form and bring to your appointment.

When all admission requirements are fulfilled, call Enrollment Services (608) 785-9553 to schedule an appointment to review your paperwork with an Enrollment Services Advisor. Bring the Intent to Enroll form to your appointment to review your paperwork with any un-submitted documentation. At this appointment, the Enrollment Services Advisory will finalize the admission process and provide you with an estimated start date. At this time, you will sign the second page of the Intent to Enroll form verifying that you have completed the requirements to enter the program and have been assigned an estimated start date.

If you are unable to begin the program on the assigned start date, you will need to resubmit the Intent to Enroll form and schedule another appointment. Students are unable to request a pass on their assigned date. They will be assigned a later start date upon resubmission of the Intent to Enroll form.

2. Meet **reading requirement** as noted in Step I, item 3.
3. Meet **math requirement** as noted in Step I, item 3.
4. Meet **writing requirement** as noted in Step I, item 3.
5. Read and complete the **Essential Functions** for your program. Essential Functions are a listing of the physical, cognitive, and mental abilities that you will need in order to complete the program. You must read the Essential Functions and complete the appropriate section on page two of the Intent to Enroll form. If you have a documented disability, there may be accommodations that can be made to assist in your successful completion of the program. Please contact Disability Services at Western (608-785-9875) if you are in need of more information.

A change in your ability to perform any of the Essential Functions must be reported to Laurie Raddatz, Associate Dean, 608 785-9409, or to your instructor immediately.

6. **Biology**. You must successfully complete (C grade or better) biology at the high school and/or college level. If you have not previously taken this course, you can fulfill this requirement by taking it at Western. This requirement must be completed prior to taking General Anatomy and Physiology.
7. **Chemistry**. You must successfully complete (C grade or better) chemistry at the high school and/or college level. If you have not previously taken this course, you can fulfill this requirement by taking it at Western. This requirement must be completed prior to taking General Anatomy and Physiology.
8. **General Anatomy & Physiology**: You must successfully complete college level General Anatomy & Physiology (C grade or better). This can be taken at Western or may be able to transfer in from another college if the course material is the same.

9. Complete **Keyboarding Test** successfully at 35 words per minute (WPM). Testing is available free of charge at the Western Assessment Center in La Crosse, (608) 785-9566. Please call for an appointment. A test can also be done online at www.typingtest.com. You must submit test results to Enrollment Services.

** In the event that you have difficulty printing the necessary forms, please contact the Welcome Center at (608) 785-9553 to have the forms mailed to you.

Medical Coding Specialist (MCS) Program Overview

Program Information

- Visit the [Program Resource page](#)
Note: All of the program courses for Medical Coding Specialist (MCS) are included in the HIT program.
 - Review the Curriculum page for course sequencing
 - Review the Placement Information page for information on graduate placement and salaries
 - Review the Program Brochure for course descriptions and prerequisites. Courses are offered only once per year. The program begins with General A&P in the summer.
 - Review the Learn More About This Program page for Admission Criteria, Frequently Asked Questions, and other items of interest.

Online Requirements

- Most of the program specific courses for the Medical Coding Specialist are offered online, providing students with a great degree of flexibility in scheduling in terms of the place and time they will complete the course work. Students should plan on spending at least as much time with the material for an online course as they would in a regular classroom. There are specific expiration (due) dates for assignments that are controlled by the course management software. If assignments are not completed on time, they will no longer be accessible online. Organization and time management skills, a reliable Internet connection and regular communication with the instructor are essential for student success in an online course. There are proctored (live) exams for each online course which the student may take with the instructor, a proctor, in the Academic Success Center or at any regional learning center.
- Visit the Virtual College website at www.westernnc.edu/onlinelearning and refer to System Requirements
 - Review the recommended PC Platform. Most of the program specific courses are online or web supported. It is essential that you

have an appropriate system, e-mail and Internet connection to be successful in this program.

- Order the Microsoft Software package (Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint) at student discount pricing. This is needed for students to gain access to lecture notes and lab activities on the program website.

Essential Resources

- See <http://www.westerntc.edu/getstarted> for **Important Forms** - Academic Calendar, Admissions Application, Transfer Credit Evaluation
- See Student Handbook or www.westerntc.edu/currentstudents for **Important Documents** - Student Handbook, Student E-mail Guide, Grievance Form; **Policies and Procedures** - including but not limited to Academic Standing, Attendance, Grading and Appeals, Drop/Add or ,Withdrawal, Code of Conduct and Academic Dishonesty, Graduation Requirements, Student Rights, Privacy, Nondiscrimination Policy; **Registration Information** - Tuition and Fees, Drop/Withdrawal Refund Policy; **Student Support Services**
- See <http://www.westerntc.edu/programs> then click “Medical Coding Specialist” under “Health Behind The Scenes” for Curriculum, Course Outcomes Summaries (credits, prerequisites, textbooks and supplies, competencies, objectives), Program Accreditation information

Professional Association Membership

- Upon graduation from the program, MCS students are eligible to take the Certified Coding Associate (CCA) exam of the American Health Information Management Association. Passing the exam signifies that the student has met nationally recognized, entry level competencies. For more information visit <http://www.ahima.org>

Professional Organizations

» [American Health Information Management Association](#)

» [Wisconsin Health Information Management Association](#)

Program Head:

Tamra R. Brown, ME, RHIA
brownt@westerntc.edu
(608)785-9549

Instructor:

Susan Summerfield, BBA, RHIT
summerfields@westerntc.edu
(608) 789-6103

Summer Contact:

Paula Zastrow
Administrative Program Assistant
zastrowp@westerntc.edu
(608) 785-9409

Instructor Websites

[Tamra Brown](#)

Job Market

- The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, projects an employment increase for health information workers by 18% through 2016 – faster than average for all occupations. Technicians with a strong background in coding will be in particularly high demand.

- For current salary information you can visit the MCS Program page at www.westerntc.edu. Click Programs, Medical Coding Specialist, and look under the Placement tab.

Questions

- If you have questions, contact the Program Head, Tamra Brown, at brownt@westerntc.edu or (608) 785-9549.

Acceptance to a Program

Students will be admitted to this program once the student has completed the Intent to Enroll, met the program requirements and met with an Enrollment Services advisor. Program admission is based upon a first come, first served basis. Once the program is filled, students will be admitted to the next term. If an opening occurs in an earlier term, you may be contacted.

In the event that the program is not full, applications will continue to be accepted until 3 weeks prior to the start of the program. Applicants who meet all admission requirements will be accepted on a first come, first served basis until the program is full.

It is to the student's advantage to complete admission requirements for the program as soon as possible.

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. How flexible is the program in meeting my individual needs?** Most of the program specific courses for the Medical Coding Specialist are offered online, providing the student with a great degree of flexibility in scheduling in terms of the place and time they will complete the course work. Some online courses may require 3 or 4 class meetings and proctored testing sessions. Students should plan on spending at least as much time with the material for an online course as they would in a regular classroom. There are specific expiration (due) dates for assignments which are controlled by the course management software – if assignments are not completed on time, they will no longer be accessible online.
- 2. What's it like to take an online class?** Organization and time management skills, a reliable Internet connection and regular communication with the instructor are essential for student success in an online course. The recommended PC platform and information about ordering discounted software can be found on the Virtual College website at www.westerntc.edu/onlinelearning (see System Requirements).

3. **Is field work part of the curriculum?** No internship experience is required for the Medical Coding Specialist although the instructor may schedule a lab activity in a clinical facility to expose students to coding in an actual job setting.
4. **Are there licensing or certification requirements after graduation?** Upon graduation, Medical Coding Specialists are eligible to take the Certified Coding Associate Exam of the American Health Information Management Association. Additional certification exams are available for those with on the job experience in coding. Passing the exam signifies that the student has met nationally recognized entry level competencies.
5. **Are there growth opportunities in this field?** All of the Medical Coding Specialist program courses transfer in to the Health Information Technology program. Medical Coding Specialist students interested in becoming an HIT must apply for admission to that program and must meet HIT program admission criteria.
6. **Can I change from the Medical Coding Specialist to Health Information Technology program?** Yes, although the change must be done by completing a Change of Program form, which is available in the Welcome Center. When changing to HIT, you must meet the admission requirements which include meeting different COMPASS scores than were required for Medical Coding Specialist, completing a background check, completing immunization forms and meeting different essential functions. See the online overview for the HIT program at <http://www.westerntc.edu/programs/> and click on Health Information Technology.
7. **Whom do I contact if I have questions?**
 - Questions specific to a program:
 - Contact Tamra Brown, Program Head.
 - Questions related to career decisions:
 - Contact a counselor at (608) 785-9553.
 - Questions on your admission file:
 - Contact through email (include your name, ID# or birth date) and your specific question to:
 - Sandy Peterson petersons@westerntc.edu,
 - Deb Kaiser kaiserd@westerntc.edu
 - Stacey Nelson nelsons@westerntc.edu

Concluding thoughts:

- You are responsible to keep your contact information (address/phone number) current. Contact Enrollment Services to let the College know of any changes or update your information on your MyWestern student account.
- Pay close attention to the deadlines for completing program admission requirements. Your most time-consuming admission requirement is immunizations. Start working on completing the forms immediately.
- Students in a health or public safety program are required to have a “C” grade or better in all general studies and program courses. Students who have less than a “C” grade in General Anatomy and Physiology are required to participate in remedial work designed to assist in successful completion when they repeat the course. Please see the student handbook for more information on College and Division policies. The student Handbook is available on the college website (http://www.westerntc.edu/student_handbook/StudentPlanner.pdf).

Best wishes as you continue your journey towards entering a health or public safety program at Western Technical College. We look forward to working with you as you pursue a career in health or public safety.