

Health Information Technology Program Western Technical College

Supplemental Information

- **Course Sequence and Delivery.** The Health Information Technology (HIT) is a two-year associate degree program consisting of 62 credits. The curriculum consists of a variety of technical and general studies courses designed to help students meet the entry-level competencies of the American Health Information Management Association, as well as the needs of employers.
- **General Anatomy and Physiology.** Students take General Anatomy and Physiology (General A&P) in the summer term before beginning core program courses in the fall. Successful completion of General A&P (a grade of “C” or better) is a prerequisite for Human Diseases for Health Professionals in the fall term that in turn is a prerequisite for coding courses throughout the program. Students who are unsuccessful in General A&P in the summer (Term 1) will be allowed to continue with core program courses in the Fall (Term 2) if they are also enrolled in General A&P. Students in this situation must successfully complete General A&P prior to progressing to the spring (Term 3). Along with traditional face-to-face meetings, General A&P is offered in multiple formats, including blended and online options. If this is your first introduction to this material or if it has been some time since you were exposed to it, there are a variety of supplemental supports that can help you be successful. Please ask your Admissions Coach or College Advisor about which one might work best for you. The General Studies Division offers this course every term, so you may choose to enroll in it prior to your first term. Please discuss which option is best for you with your Admissions Coach or College Advisor.
- **Introductory Statistics.** The HIT program’s accreditor, the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM), requires that all students take a basic statistics course as part of their program. We highly encourage you to take advantage of the Learning Commons Math Center for additional tutoring support to ensure you are successful in this challenging course. The Math Center offers drop-in in-person and Zoom tutoring; no appointments are necessary. Hours vary by term and are posted on the Learning Commons Blackboard page.
- **Professional Practice.** Health Information Technology students participate in 120 hours of professional practice experience (PPE) during the final 15 weeks of the program, split between two sites (60 hours per site). The recommended PPE schedule is 8.5 hours per day which includes a half-hour lunch break. You can adjust the recommended schedule to an alternative schedule that accommodates both the clinical site and student. Example: Monday 4.5 hours and Friday 4 hours for a total of 8.5 hours for the week. Work with your PPE instructor and site supervisor to determine dates and times of attendance. Students can receive only 60 hours of work credit. PPE should NOT be scheduled during class meeting times for other courses.
- **Reliable Transportation.** You will need reliable transportation to complete the requirements of the Professional Practice Experience (PPE) course. The program utilizes PPE sites in La Crosse and the surrounding area. Students are responsible for their own transportation expenses.

- **Certification.** Upon graduation from the program, or enrollment in the final semester of study (i.e., the student will graduate at the end of the current term), HIT students are eligible to take the Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) exam of the American Health Information Management Association. Passing the exam signifies that the student has met nationally recognized, entry level competencies. Early testing gives the candidate a competitive advantage immediately upon graduation. Early testing candidates will be awarded the RHIT credential once they have passed the exam and submitted an official transcript to the AHIMA indicating that they have successfully completed the requirements of their associate degree. For more information, visit www.ahima.org.
- **Comparing Health Information Technology (HIT) and Medical Coding Specialist(MCS).** Both the HIT and MCS programs prepare students equally for careers related to coding and revenue management through a series of rigorous human science, coding and reimbursement related courses. The HIT degree has a broader scope than the MCS and for this reason it may lead to more and better paying job opportunities.
- **Overview of Careers in Health Information Technology.** The future of health information management is rapidly changing as a result of advances in health care and technology. National accreditation standards require all HIT educational programs to address competencies related to data management and/or revenue management in order to prepare graduates to meet these challenges. The HIT program at Western is geared toward developing competencies in both areas.

HITs ensure the availability, quality, integrity and protection of data related to patient care. Students develop knowledge and skills in data management through the use of spreadsheets, databases, data visualization techniques, data analysis, compliance with legislation and more.

HIT programs incorporate the disciplines of medicine, management, finance, information technology, and law into one curriculum. Because of this unique mixture, graduates can choose from a variety of work settings across an array of healthcare environments.

Examples of entry and mid-career level job titles as a Health Information Technician include:

- **Release of Information (ROI) Specialist:** applies laws pertaining to patient privacy and security in releasing medical information to patients and 3rd party requestors with proper authorization.
- **Compliance Officer:** evaluates contracts and licenses for compliance with laws and regulations, reviews security and protection of Protected Health Information (PHI) and Personally Identifiable Information (PII).
- **Credentialing Specialist:** verifies that the credentials of health care professionals are in compliance with state and federal standards and medical staff bylaws, rules and regulations; maintains a database of practitioners' training, education, licensing and experience which is used for physician appointment and reappointment purposes and queries/reports data to practitioner databanks.
- **HIM Documentation Specialist:** ensures the integrity of documentation in the electronic health record. Reviews documentation in the electronic health record for accuracy and completeness. Supports the continuity of patient care by ensuring timely collection, analysis and availability of patient health care records. Works with members of the healthcare organization to monitor and provide recommendations for accurate, timely and complete documentation in alignment with state and federal regulations.

- **Registry Technician:** Registries help increase our understanding of specific conditions and treatments by collecting data about individuals that is used by public health officials, clinical researchers and others to track trends for a population. The registry technician collects, codes and abstracts data on specific diseases or disorders (such as cancer or trauma) and may perform ongoing follow-up on the patient's health status. Because of its importance in decision making, maintaining the integrity of registry data is of the utmost importance.
- **Data Analyst:** gathers and interprets data and creates executive level dashboards using a variety of enterprise database systems to help organizations improve quality, increase patient satisfaction and lower the cost of care; presents data to help others understand the operational impact of the data.
- **HIM Department Supervisor/Assistant:** may work in a variety of health settings (acute care, long term care, behavioral health, etc.) overseeing staff that are responsible for coding, quality improvement, clinical documentation improvement, release of information and more; ensures compliance with legislation and standards related to patient privacy, security and documentation, prepares and analyzes clinical data for research, quality improvement, utilization management and more.

Examples of entry and mid-career level job titles related to Revenue Management

- **Coding Professional:** accurately translates the patient's clinical status into coded data which is used for reimbursement, public health statistics, disease tracking/trending and more, conducts audits to verify the accuracy of codes and reimbursement groups, provides education for coding specialists, documentation specialists and physicians, uses revenue cycle reports, follows up on claim denials and queries physicians to clarify documentation needed for coding. Entry level graduates typically find jobs in the outpatient or physician office setting and may move into inpatient coding after several years of experience.
 - **Insurance Claims Specialist:** reviews insurance policies to determine coverage, prepares insurance claim forms, transmits claims for payment or further investigation, contacts the insured or other involved persons to obtain missing information and applies insurance rating systems.
 - **HIM Revenue Cycle Analyst:** identifies areas of non-compliance in coding, charge capture and revenue cycle data collection and makes recommendations for improvement.
- **Immunizations** - Vaccines can protect both you and the people you come in contact within your home, at work or in the community. Immunizations provide preventative measures to reduce your risk of contracting serious diseases that affect your health. To protect you during your Professional Practice Experience course Western requires that you obtain the following immunizations after careful consultation with your healthcare provider regarding risks and side effects: Tetanus, TB, MMR, Varicella, and Influenza. If Covid vaccines are required by a clinical partner, you will be notified. You will receive more information about this at the end of the first-year courses.

- **Dress Code, Body Art and Piercings.** The dress code for Professional Practice Experience is typically business casual but each facility will set their own policies for students. The wearing and displaying of jewelry in the health care or public safety setting is generally limited to wrist watches and wedding rings or small non-dangling earrings. The purpose of this limitation is related to infection control, safety and public perception of the employees while they are on duty.

If you have significant visible body art and piercings, we are unable to guarantee placement in the professional practice setting. You may be asked to cover the body art with clothing or dressings or remove the piercings in order to complete your rotation. Most employment settings have policies that are generally broad, however they do reserve the right to deny employment and student placement if body art or piercings are found to be offensive to those in that setting. It is your decision whether or not to enter the program based on the uncertainty of being accepted at those sites.

- **Program Faculty.** If you have specific questions about the program or your particular situation, please contact the HIT program faculty directly.

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