



UNC SYSTEM
ACADEMIC PROGRAM PLANNING GUIDE

July 2025

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Metrics and Relevant Data Sources	3
Determine Degree Concept and Strategic Fit	4
Request for Planning Authorization (RPA)	4
Return on Investment Calculation	4
Request to Establish (RTE)	5
Student Demand.....	5
Workforce Alignment	6
Education Premium	6
Program to Occupation Mapping Tips	6
Additional Data Sources.....	7
Academic Program Inventory	7
Peer Institutions.....	7
Student Data Mart (SDM)	8
NC Commerce	8
Bureau of Labor Statistics (OEWS)	8
NC Commerce Star Jobs.....	9
CIP-SOC Crosswalk	9

Executive Summary

This document serves as a streamlined reference for institutions within the UNC System seeking approval for new academic programs, based on UNC Policy 400.1 and Regulation 400.1.1[R]. It outlines key expectations for program planning and offers practical guidance for completing the Request for Planning Authorization (RPA) and Request to Establish (RTE) forms. The planning process includes strategic fit, student and workforce demand, ROI analysis, and alignment with UNC System goals.

Institutions begin by determining program relevance and strategic alignment, identifying CIP and SOC codes, and selecting appropriate delivery modalities. The RPA focuses on initial program justification, while the RTE requires a comprehensive case with enrollment projections, curriculum mapping, faculty resources, and budget. Supporting data from sources like IPEDS, Student Data Mart, NC Commerce, and BLS are used to validate demand, workforce alignment, and educational premium.

The guide emphasizes clarity, alignment, and transparency, and introduces helpful tools for data sourcing, occupation mapping, and evidence-based program design. It also links new program proposals with productivity review metrics and helps ensure sustainable and high-value academic offerings across the System.

Metrics and Relevant Data Sources

Metric/Requirement	Relevant Resource(s)
Student Demand	UNC Student Data Mart, Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS), UNC Data Dashboards, Peer Institutions List
Workforce Alignment	NC Commerce Star Jobs, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Projections, CIP-SOC Crosswalk
Education Premium	NC Commerce, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Wage Data, Education Premium Calculations
Return on Investment	UNC Tuition & Fees Tables, Student Data Mart, Time-to-Degree, NC Commerce Wage Data
Program-to-Occupation Mapping	CIP-SOC Crosswalk, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), NC Commerce Star Jobs, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

Purpose

This guide is a companion document to [UNC Policy Manual](#) 400.1 “Policy on Academic Program Planning” and 400.1.1[R] “Regulation for Academic Program Planning and Evaluation.” The same or similar metrics will be used in new program proposals as well as for existing program productivity review. This guide also supports institutions completing the "Request for Planning Authorization" and "Request to Establish a New Academic Degree Program" forms required for new degree program approval. It clarifies key expectations outlined in UNC Regulation 400.1.1[R] and outlines helpful tips to ensure programs are designed and justified in accordance with policy. The data collected during the RPA and RTE degree application process will also be included in the academic program materials template for University of North Carolina Board of Governors degree program approvals, and according to the Academic Programs Calendar published on the [Academic Program Planning](#) website.

Determine Degree Concept and Strategic Fit

- Confirm alignment with the institution’s mission and the strategic goals of the UNC System.
- Review similar programs in the UNC System and regionally to avoid unnecessary duplication.
- Identify the Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) codes.
- Identify Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes for which students will be prepared to enter upon earning this degree.
- Consider appropriate mode(s) of delivery (on-campus, online, site-based).

Request for Planning Authorization (RPA)

Access the most current version of the RPA from the [Academic Program Planning](#) website. Include the following:

- Program Summary: Purpose, intended audience, and strategic alignment.
- Workforce Need: Use NC Department of Commerce and labor market data to demonstrate workforce alignment.
- Student Demand: Reference IPEDS and UNC enrollment and completion trends. See additional metrics for Student Demand below.
- Anticipated areas of employment: Match instructional program to likely occupations

Return on Investment Calculation

Include the tuition and fees multiplied by the institution’s average time to degree for the stated degree program and compare this to potential earnings for job placement five years out from graduation.

- UNC Board of Governors approved tuition and fees for existing programs are revised and published annually [on the UNC System website](#).
- Average Time to Degree can be calculated by an individual university or requested and calculated by the UNC System Office via institutional reporting to [Student Data Mart](#).

Request to Establish (RTE)

Access the most current version of the RTE from the [Academic Program Planning](#) website.

Provide a more detailed case for program establishment, including:

- Curriculum Plan: Include a sample 4- or 5-year map of coursework by term.
- Enrollment Projections: Show projected enrollment for years 1, 3, and 5, with delivery method breakdown.
- Faculty and Resources: Identify whether faculty or staff hires are needed.
- Budget: Use the UNC System 5-Year Budget Template (include tuition differentials if applicable).
- Licensure or Accreditation Needs: Note any required approvals from licensing bodies.
- Collaboration Opportunities: Identify any planned collaboration with other UNC System institutions.

Student Demand

- Use 5-year enrollment/completion trends from UNC System institutions, and IPEDS/UNC Board of Governors approved peer institutions. For graduate programs, include applied and admitted metrics for UNC System institutions with similar degrees, and IPEDS/UNC Board of Governors approved peer institutions.
- Trendlines and narrative summaries showing growth or consistent interest strengthen your case.
 - The UNC System Office currently publishes publicly available [Interactive Data Dashboards](#) with enrollment and completion counts, which can be found here:
 - The [Enrollment Dashboard](#) has a tab for Enrollment By Major, which can be filtered by university, CIP, and degree level among other filters
 - Similarly, the [Degrees Dashboard](#) has a tab for Degrees Awarded By Major, which can be filtered by university, CIP, and degree level among other filters
 - IPEDS Completions for any U.S. postsecondary institution can be downloaded by reporting year [here](#).
 - Applied, Admitted, and [New] Enrolled counts by major should be requested by the individual institutions or requested and compiled by the System Office via institutional reporting to the [Student Data Mart](#) (SDM).

- UNC Board of Governors-approved Peer Institutions as of July 1, 2025 can be found [here](#).

Workforce Alignment

- Justify the link between the proposed program and workforce need in NC.
- Highlight projected job growth and educational requirements for linked occupations.
 - Using the CIP-SOC crosswalk with education requirement as established in Section III, projected employment demand is estimated by [NC Commerce via the Star Jobs resources](#).
 - For national projected employment demand, BLS publishes projections by occupation, which can be downloaded [here](#).

Education Premium

- Demonstrate the wage advantage of graduates with the proposed degree compared to those with a lower credential.
- Use data from NC Commerce and Bureau of Labor Statistics. See the information under Additional Data Sources below.

Program to Occupation Mapping Tips

Start with the CIP-SOC Crosswalk identified on the National Center for Education Statistics website. Although “not based on actual empirical data...the CIP-SOC Crosswalk was originally created to provide a resource for current and future postsecondary education students about programs that could provide the type of training they need to be successful in a particular occupation.” Therefore, pay attention to the CIP chosen for a program as well as the occupations in which a student might find employment BEFORE you start institutional and degree approval processes.

Occupation metrics should consider multiple factors, and no single methodology is appropriate for all programs. Methodologies that should be considered are listed below. If none of these methodologies are used, documentation should be provided demonstrating a different data-driven CIP-SOC relationship or CIP-Industry relationship.

1. Using only the CIP of the program being evaluated, filter the SOC's from the CIP-SOC crosswalk, further filter these SOC's based on the minimum education requirement that aligns with the program being evaluated.
2. Using only the CIP of the program being evaluated, filter the SOC's from the CIP-SOC crosswalk, then add similar SOC's using the SOC hierarchy minor level, further filter these

SOCs based on the minimum education requirement that aligns with the program being evaluated.

3. Starting with the CIP of the program being evaluated, filter the SOC from the CIP-SOC crosswalk, further filter these SOC based on the minimum education requirement that aligns with the program being evaluated. Using these SOC, filter the CIPs from the CIP-SOC crosswalk, add these CIPs to the list of CIPs being evaluated in addition to the original program CIP.
4. Starting with the CIP of the program being evaluated, filter the SOC from the CIP-SOC crosswalk, then add similar SOC using the SOC hierarchy minor level, further filter these SOC based on the minimum education requirement that aligns with the program being evaluated. Using these SOC, filter the CIPs from the CIP-SOC crosswalk, add these CIPs to the list of CIPs being evaluated in addition to the original program CIP.
5. If the CIP does not crosswalk to a SOC with an equivalent education minimum or to any SOC, start with the CIP of the program being evaluated, add similar CIPs based on the CIP code hierarchy, then filter the SOC from the CIP-SOC crosswalk and continue with one of the methodologies noted above.

Additional Data Sources

Publicly available data will be the official source of data when possible, supplemented with internally available datasets like Student Data Mart (SDM). The institution may choose to use a third-party vendor to provide supporting evidence for program proposals or productivity. Please note that these metrics will be reviewed against publicly available data sources; additional supporting documentation may be needed if there are discrepancies between data sources.

Some data from Student Data Mart and NC Commerce have additional access restrictions but is broadly available to universities in the UNC System. Please contact your Institutional Research office or the System Office Enterprise Data Office via data@northcarolina.edu for assistance with compiling program-specific data.

Academic Program Inventory. Through statutory authority, the UNC Board of Governors may authorize the establishment of new degree programs and the discontinuation of existing degree programs. All degree programs authorized by the Board can be found using the [Program and Degree Finder](#).

Peer Institutions are the [UNC Board of Governors approved list of institutions](#) for academic benchmarking. They also represent a standardized set of institutions to serve as a reference point for strategic planning.

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) is available as an aggregated dataset shared annually and available via the IPEDS website, contains enrollment data by institution and completion data by program and institution. The datasets are generally downloadable by IPEDS survey with a provisional dataset available approximately one year after the academic year cycle and a final dataset available approximately two years after the academic year cycle.

- a. Relevant metric(s): student interest/pipeline for existing or proposed programs
- b. Known caveat: publicly available data are typically 1-2 years behind present day
- c. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds>

Student Data Mart (SDM) is available as a unit-record, identifiable dataset with term-based data available post-census; unit-record data from the original institution is available for use by that institution while it typically is only available in aggregate for other UNC's.

- a. Relevant metric(s): student interest/pipeline for existing or proposed programs, ROI for existing or proposed programs
- b. Known caveat: publicly available data are typically in aggregate with small-count suppression
- c. <https://uncdm.northcarolina.edu/sdm/index.htm>
- d. <https://www.northcarolina.edu/impact/stats-data-reports-interactive-data-dashboards/>

NC Commerce data is available as a unit-record, identifiable dataset shared annually with us for post-education outcomes, contains industry and wage data, but not occupation.

- a. Relevant metric(s): post-graduation outcomes, ROI for existing programs
- b. Known caveat: only available for employees whose company/employer is required to submit unemployment benefits wage data to NC Commerce, only available for former UNC students
- c. <https://www.commerce.nc.gov/data-tools-reports>

Bureau of Labor Statistics (OEWS) data is available as an aggregated dataset shared annually with us and available via NC Commerce/BLS websites, contains industry, occupation, geographic region, and wage data (survey). The websites allow for a targeted download (a specific industry-occupation-region parameter), but the underlying complete dataset can be provided to us by NC Commerce.

- a. Relevant metric(s): ROI for existing or proposed programs

- b. Known caveat: level of education and years of experience of individuals are unknown/all employees are aggregated regardless of education or years in position, survey data
- c. <https://d4.nccommerce.com/OESSelection.aspx> and based on <https://www.bls.gov/oes/methods-overview.htm>

NC Commerce Star Jobs data is available as an aggregated dataset shared annually with us and available via NC Commerce website, contains occupation, geographic region, wage, current and projected employment counts and openings, and minimum education level required for given occupation.

- a. Relevant metric(s): workforce demand for existing or proposed programs, education premium for existing or proposed programs
- b. Known caveat: level of education and years of experience of individuals are unknown/all employees are aggregated
- c. https://tools.nccareers.org/starjobs/star_jobs.html and based on <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/education-and-training-by-occupation.htm>

CIP-SOC Crosswalk is available as a many-to-many relational dataset between programs and occupations developed by BLS and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

- a. Relevant metric(s): anything linking program and occupation data
- b. Known caveat: some CIPs/SOCs have no match, many-to-many relationship can create complicated paths between program(s) and occupation(s) when assessing wage and workforce demand
- c. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/post3.aspx?y=56>