



HEALTH INFORMATION DEPARTMENT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

We are excited that you have chosen NDSCS to further your educational goals and your interest in the Health Information Technology program. This document provides you with information to assist you with the admissions process for the Health Information Program. There are two different paths you can pursue on either a full-time or part-time status:

- Health Information Technology Associate of Applied Science Degree
- Medical Coding Certificate

Program Handbooks are published in your first Health Information Technology course; HIT 176 Introduction to Health Information.

General Information

NDSCS offers North Dakota's only health information technician program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM).

Students will participate in one virtual professional practice course on each track. The HIT AS program also includes one onsite experience with a minimum of 40 hours to be completed over a semester period in their last course of the program. It is the student's responsibility to seek their PPE placement facility to locate an organization in their geographic location and organization with a Health Information Management Department that supports their interest. At that time, your professional practice activity coordinator will help you facilitate the requirements before the externship is scheduled to begin. Additional academic training includes virtual learning laboratories which include AHIMA Virtual Lab and EHR Go. Tuition and fees are assessed for these courses.

At the conclusion of the program, graduates are eligible to apply and sit for the Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) certification and Clinical Coding Associate (CCA) through the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA).

HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNICIAN AAS DEGREE:

What is a health information technician? Registered Health Information Technician are certified professionals who work in hospitals, office-based physician practices, nursing homes, home health agencies, mental health facilities, and public health



agencies. RHITs may also be employed in any organization that uses patient data or health information, such as pharmaceutical companies, law and insurance firms, and health product vendors. Health Information professionals care for patients by caring for their medical data, focusing on completeness, accuracy and protection. They use computer applications to organize, analyze, evaluate, and report health data, complying with laws, standards, and regulations. Health information technicians may also specialize in coding diagnoses and procedures in health records for reimbursement and other purposes. The skills and abilities in this profession have a direct impact on the quality of patient care and healthcare statistics. HITs ensure the accuracy, privacy, and completeness of health records, which impacts everything from patient care to insurance claims, public health data, and hospital performance metrics.

Key Responsibilities

- **Medical Records Management:** Collecting, reviewing, and maintaining accurate patient data, including histories, lab results, treatments, and diagnoses.
- **Coding and Classification:** Assigning standardized codes (ICD-10, CPT, HCPCS) for diagnoses, procedures, and services to ensure proper billing and insurance reimbursement.
- **Data Quality and Compliance:** Ensuring records meet legal, regulatory, and ethical standards (e.g., HIPAA compliance).
- **Electronic Health Records (EHRs):** Using software systems to store, update, and retrieve patient information.
- **Auditing and Reporting:** Assisting in audits, creating reports for internal use or regulatory agencies, and contributing to quality improvement initiatives.

What employment opportunities are available?

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), employment of health information technologists and medical registrars is projected to grow 16% from 2023 to 2033, a rate significantly faster than the average for all occupations, which is approximately 4% over the same period.

This projected growth is driven by several factors, including the increasing adoption of electronic health records (EHRs), the need for data analysis to improve healthcare outcomes, and the emphasis on data privacy and security. As healthcare systems continue to digitize and prioritize data-driven decision-making, professionals in health information technology will play a crucial role in managing and securing patient data.

In addition to the projected growth, the BLS estimates about 3,200 job openings annually for health information technologists and medical registrars over the decade.



These openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire.

For those interested in pursuing a career in this field, it's worth noting that the median annual wage for health information technologists and medical registrars was \$73,410 as of May 2023. Please remember, there are additional factors including certifications, experience, supervisory experience, soft skills, etc.

The outlook for health information technologists and medical registrars is promising, with strong job growth and competitive salaries anticipated in the coming years.

Reference Link: [Bureau of Labor Statistics Health Information Technician](#)

Employment opportunities may include hospitals, nursing homes, behavioral health facilities, insurance companies, physician practices, software vendors, auditing firms, government agencies, and other facilities outside of healthcare. Positions may be available onsite, virtually, and/or hybrid.

Graduates may pursue a bachelor's degree at another institution, and/or obtain specialty certifications for further advancement and management opportunities in the profession. This will be discussed with students at the end of their program during their last course.

The Health Information Technology AAS Degree requires HIT 297 Professional Practice II. This course is a virtual course with a ground-based live 40-hour externship requirement. It is the student's responsibility to seek placement at a healthcare facility with Health Information Technology Management Degree where the college attempts to place the student in their local area. Students will be registered as traditional students for this course and tuition rates will be based on students' state of residency. For more information about non-resident rates, contact the NDSCS Financial Aid Office at 1-800-342-4325, ext. 2207.

What is a medical coder?

A medical coder is a trained healthcare professional responsible for reviewing clinical documentation and converting diagnoses, procedures, medical services, and equipment into standardized alphanumeric codes. These codes—primarily from the ICD-10-CM, CPT, and HCPCS coding systems—are essential for accurate billing, insurance reimbursement, data collection, and compliance with federal regulations. Medical coders work behind the scenes in a variety of healthcare settings, including hospitals, physician offices, outpatient clinics, insurance companies, and even remotely.



from home. Their role ensures that healthcare providers are properly reimbursed for services rendered and that patient records accurately reflect the care provided.

The American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) is one of the leading professional organizations that certifies and supports medical coders. AHIMA offers nationally recognized certifications that validate a coder's expertise and commitment to best practices in health information management. AHIMA-certified coders demonstrate proficiency in areas such as medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, health record documentation, and federal healthcare regulations such as HIPAA. Earning a certification through AHIMA enhances a medical coder's credibility and may increase job opportunities, earning potential, and professional growth within the field of health information management.

What employment opportunities are available?

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), employment of medical records specialists, which includes medical coders, is projected to grow 9% from 2023 to 2033, a rate much faster than the average for all occupations. This growth is expected to result in approximately 15,000 job openings annually over the decade. These openings will arise from both the creation of new positions and the need to replace workers who retire or transition to other roles.

The increasing demand for medical coders is largely driven by the aging population, which leads to a higher volume of medical services and, consequently, more health records requiring accurate coding for billing and insurance purposes. Additionally, the widespread adoption of electronic health records (EHRs) and the emphasis on data-driven healthcare decisions contribute to the need for skilled professionals in this field.

For those interested in a broader scope within health information management, the BLS also projects that employment of health information technologists and medical registrars will grow by 16% from 2023 to 2033, reflecting the expanding role of technology and data analysis in healthcare.

These projections highlight the promising career prospects for individuals pursuing roles in medical coding and health information management.

Reference Link: [Bureau of Labor Statistics Medical Coding](#)

After you graduate from the certificate program, students are eligible to apply and sit for the Clinical Coding Associate (CCA) exam.



Once you complete your Medical Coding Certificate you can easily continue your education by pursuing the Health Information Technology AS Degree. For further advancement in the profession, additional coding certifications are encouraged after the graduate attains work experience.

Program Admission Requirements

Program Admission Requirements are subject to updates. Please check the department or program website under "Program Admission Requirements" for current information.

Curriculum Requirements

A grade of "C" or above must be achieved in **all** courses to advance in the program and prior to taking the practicum or professional practice courses.

Essential Program Requirements

Applicants must have the ability to perform the *Essential Program Requirements* as listed on the Health Information Program Information FAQ file on the college website and in this document

Is the program completely virtual?

The program is CAHIIM accredited which requires the Health Information Technology AS program to include a Professional Practice Experiences which includes a virtual course with a 40-hour onsite practicum. Academic training includes virtual learning laboratories through AHIMA Virtual Lab or EHR Go. HIT 297 PPE II includes an onsite component. Tuition and fees are assessed for these courses.

HIT AAS Degree

The first professional practice takes place early in the summer semester between the first and second year of the program. All first-year course work must be successfully completed prior to this experience. The second professional practice takes place during the last semester of the program, which is Spring semester 2nd year following completion of all other program courses. A grade of 'C' or above must be achieved in all courses to take the professional practices/practicum courses.

MEDICAL CODING CERTIFICATE

Academic training includes virtual learning laboratories. At the end of the program, students will complete a capstone practicum, which includes a variety of virtual coding experiences. Tuition and fees are assessed for this course.



HIT AAS Accreditation Statement

The Health Information Technician Associate in Applied Science degree program at NDSCS is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education, 233 N. Michigan Ave., 21st Floor, Chicago, IL 60601-5800; telephone 312 (233-1100)

www.cahiim.org

Medical Coding Program Approval Statement



The North Dakota State College of Science Medical Coding program option is approved by the AHIMA Professional Certificate Approval Program. This designation acknowledges the coding program as having been evaluated by a peer review process against a national minimum set of standards for entry level coding professionals. This process allows academic institutions, healthcare organizations and private companies to be acknowledged as offering an approved coding certificate program.

“Value for Students” Statement

The AHIMA Professional Certificate Approval Program designation:

- Identifies specialized programs that meet established coding educational standards.
- Stimulates improvement of educational standards through faculty development opportunities, and by involving faculty and staff in program evaluation and planning.
- Promotes a better understanding of the goals of professional coding education.
- Provides reasonable assurance that practitioners possess the necessary job skills upon entry into the profession.

Timeframe of Program Approval: July of 2018 to July 17, 2021, with annual interim approval during these years.

Are Online Classes Self-paced? Online courses are **not** self-paced or correspondence courses. The program follows the same academic calendar for start/end dates and final add/drop dates for online classes as the regular on campus classes. You can access this information at [Academic Calendar | North Dakota State College of Science \(NDSCS\) | Wahpeton/Fargo](#)



Online courses have the same rigor as ground-based courses including weekly discussions, assignments, homework, and/or quizzes. Although there may be flexibility in courses, weekly due dates are provided and are required for students. In addition, you may, need to test during “regular weekday business hours.”

Are Exam Proctors Needed? Exams may be Proctored may be required for online course exams and are at the discretion of your instructor. Your instructor will provide you with proctor information guidelines and a proctor form that you will complete and submit to your online course instructor prior to your first exam. You may take the exams with a virtual proctor. Information will be provided in your classes.

*Students in the NDSCS-Wahpeton area may test at the NDSCS Wahpeton campus Testing Center, Old Main, while students in the NDSCS-Fargo area may test at the NDSCS-Fargo test center.

To be eligible for the RHIT Credential Exam, are both the HIT Department requirements and General Education requirements completed?

Yes! You must earn your HIT AAS degree from a CAHIIM-accredited program to be eligible to take the RHIT Credentialing exam. There is a process to request early RHIT exam testing in your final semester of courses. Please refer to the AHIMA website for more information: www.ahima.org/certification

I am not sure if I should pursue the Medical Coding Certificate or the HIT AAS degree. How do I decide? It depends! Many students start with the AAS degree, while some students decide to begin by pursuing the Medical Coding Certificate. It is up to you to research and decide what track best fits your interest, passions, and needs. Most of the courses for the Medical Coding Certificate are also required for the HIT AAS degree. You can discuss this with your advisor.

How can I get experience in the Health Information Field? Tell people your plans and goals (developing a support system is crucial). Additionally, you can build your HIM experience through volunteering. Even if it's only a few hours at an HIM department you will meet potential references and employers, and you can add the experience to your resume. Research local organizations where you would like to work someday and ask if you can help. Even if the tasks are not challenging or exciting, building your network and being in an HIM environment can lead to great opportunities.

Exemption for AH 101- All freshmen are required to take AH 101: Science of Success. If a student wants to apply for an exemption from the AH 101 course, you will need to



speak to your advisor to complete the AH 101 Exemption Request Form and submit it to the Director of Student Success and Career Services, Old Main, 701-671-2272. The program director may be able to submit the request.

The link is located toward the bottom of the web page.

<https://www.ndscs.edu/current-students/student-success/first-year-experience/>

Students must submit this form and supporting documents to the Student Success Coordinator by noon of the last day to add a semester class in the student's first semester at NDSCS.

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

Technology Requirements Students must have ongoing access to a browser and must have a computer that meets the technical requirements described at: www.ndscs.edu. Assistive technology, browser plugins, and related software downloads are all described in detail. It is expected that the students will have the technology and reliable internet available at the beginning of each course they enroll in and throughout the program. Students should have a backup plan in case of technical difficulties.

Students must have a working knowledge of the internet as well as basic computer knowledge, including software installation, ability to use email, uploading and downloading files, and troubleshooting.

ESTIMATED ONLINE PROGRAM COSTS 2024-2025

	Health Information Technology AAS Degree	Medical Coding Certificate
Admission Fee- Nonrefundable	\$35	\$35
Books/Supplies (new)	\$2500	\$2500
AHIMA Student Membership	\$49/year	\$49/year
AHIMA Virtual Lab	\$195/year	\$195/year



Tuition/Mandatory Fees (Ground-based)	\$178.98/Credit (ND residents; tuition varies per state \$40/Credit instruction fee	\$178.98/Credit (ND residents; tuition varies per state \$40/Credit instruction fee
AHIMA National Certification Exams	Registered Health Information Technician Exam (RHIT) \$229 (student membership price)	Clinical Coding Associate Exam (CCA) \$199 (student membership price)
Castlebranch Background and Immunizations	\$65	N/A
Tuition/Mandatory Fees (Online)	\$214.98/Credit \$40/Credit instruction fee	\$214.98/Credit \$40/Credit instruction fee

ONLINE tuition/mandatory/online access fees:

MN RESIDENT \$232.30/Credit + \$40/Credit

Instructional fee

OTHER US RESIDENT \$243.85/Credit + \$40/Credit

Instructional fee

INTERNATIONAL \$323.24/Credit + \$40/Credit

Instructional fee

Bookstore Services: You can order your textbooks through our Bookstore by calling 1-800-342-4325, ext. 2239 or online at <http://ndscsbookstore.com/home.aspx>. The same payment options that are available for tuition and registration are available for purchasing your books.

Academic Services Center: The Academic Services Center is committed to the philosophy that everyone should have the opportunity to learn and is dedicated to helping students develop academic abilities and discover their personal strengths. The ASC strives to enhance student achievement and increase student retention by providing a wide range of college readiness and college levels courses, activities and services by working cooperatively with NDSCS departments, high schools, NDUS institutions and funding agencies. Contact 701-671-2616.

Accessibility Support Services

Any student who feels they may need accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact their instructor privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Accessibility Coordinator at NDSCS.Accessibility@ndscs.edu or 701-671-2623 to discuss possible accommodations.



Academic Advising and Career Counseling

Students should have assistance in planning their course of study. Each program has at least one faculty advisor to assist students. Your HI advisor is Dr. Brandy Gustavus. She can be reached at brandy.gustavus@ndscs.edu. The advisor for Medical Coding is also Dr. Brandy Gustavus. She can be reached at brandy.gustavus@ndscs.edu.

In addition to program advisors, the Student Success Center is a one-stop location for students to find help with the following: Course Placement questions, Assistance with Class Schedules, Change of Program- forms and counseling, Career Counseling and Career Services. Qualified division advisors are available for academic advising. Contact the Student Success at 1-800-342-4325 ext. 2263 or NDSCS.StudentSuccess@ndscs.edu

Financial Aid

The Financial Aid Office answers questions regarding the process of college financing. Carmen.Marohl@ndscs.edu or 1-800-342-4325 ext. 2191.

Library

The library staff are available to help students locate information for their assignments. Students may access materials across the state through the library website at <https://www.ndscs.edu/current-students/campus-buildings-services/mildred-johnson-library/resources> or the ODIN database at www.odin.nodak.edu.

E-Mail Account

Each student is granted access to a student e-mail account. This is the account Health Information Students should use in all college related communications. Advisors and/or faculty will not provide information at personal email addresses to ensure your privacy. If you have questions on obtaining your email account, contact ndscs.servicedesk@ndscs.edu

Planning and Prioritizing Online Learning

Planning and prioritizing are essential skills for succeeding in online learning environments, where much of the responsibility for time management falls on the student. Unlike traditional classroom settings, online courses often offer greater flexibility, which can be both an advantage and a challenge. To stay on track, students should begin by carefully reviewing the course syllabus and creating a weekly schedule that allocates specific blocks of time for studying, participating in discussions, completing assignments, and reviewing material. Setting clear goals for each week helps break large tasks into manageable pieces and reduces the likelihood of last-minute cramming or missed deadlines. Prioritizing tasks based on due dates, complexity, and personal strengths allows students to focus their energy where it's most needed. Tools like digital calendars, to-do lists, and reminder apps can support organization and accountability. By staying disciplined and proactively managing their time, students can maintain steady



progress, reduce stress, and make the most of their online learning experience.

Exams are taken at a proctoring site, online, or online proctoring arrangements to test per the course schedule and proctoring guidelines will be provided.

Length of Program

While the HIT AS Program is designed to be completed in two academic years, some students may wish to take a reduced course load per semester or part-time status. Please reach out to financial aid if taking less than full-time courses. Part-time status or under may have student completion over two and a half or three years. The maximum time allowed for part-time students to complete the program is three years. Any time allowed beyond three years is at the discretion of the department chair due to changes constantly occurring in the dynamic healthcare industry. Coursework may need to be repeated if content changes.

Essential Functions and/or Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities of a Health Information Technology Student

Essential functions are those considered to be necessary or fundamental to the performance of a job. In post-secondary education, the student's job is to learn and participate in an academic environment and the clinical environment as well. The student, with or without reasonable accommodation, must possess these essential functions.

- Must be able to use computer programs following written instructions, (e.g. word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, database, flow-charting software, plus health information programs (e.g., electronic health records, encoders, tracking systems, etc.) The ability to learn new computer applications as changes occur is required. Jobs may include up to eight hours per day of computer work.
- Must be able to protect the confidentiality/security of health and facility/practitioner business information. Must be able to comply with laws, regulations and standards. Must show honesty/ethics including not cheating and not plagiarizing on assignments. Must follow the AHIMA Code of Ethics.
- Requires ability to communicate orally and in written form (or comparable communication skills) and use proper format, punctuation, spelling and grammar. Requires proficient use of the English language. Must use critical thinking, exhibit sound judgment, show emotional stability/maturity, show physical/mental stamina, and receive/share information/instructions from instructors, patients, physicians, and others in didactic and/or clinical settings
- Must complete tasks accurately and in a timely manner. Must be able to apply principles of logical/scientific thinking and comprehend concepts. Must be adaptable, able to make decisions related to class/lab/clinical assignments and can build/maintain constructive cooperative working relationships with others and develop goals/priorities to organize/accomplish work.



- Must demonstrate professionalism, work alone or in teams, demonstrate integrity and sincerity, and show caring/sensitivity especially in areas of patient care. Must demonstrate neatness and good hygiene. Requires positive attitude when receiving constructive criticism. Must be willing to alter plans or change approaches in the learning/work environment, maintain composure and continue to function during stress. Must show respect to others. Must show dependability in attendance.
- Must be able to apply mathematical formulas, determine percentages/decimals; determine time; use metric systems, use/display descriptive statistics, calculate hospital statistics, productivity information, quality improvement studies, budgets, equipment and supply needs/costs, medical bills, etc. Must be able to construct formulas when preparing computerized spreadsheets.
- Requires the ability to travel to and from Professional Practice Experience facilities, public locations for the purposes of various meetings, or other assigned locations off campus.
- Students Individual Needs – Students requiring reasonable accommodations to meet program requirements must consult with the Accessibility Services Office as soon as possible to discuss their individual needs.
- Endurance necessary to complete 40-hour week during professional practice/practicum experiences.

If you need help with the college application or the registration steps, please contact Student Success at ndscs.studentsuccess@ndscs.edu.

For questions about technical issues, please contact our help desk at ndscs.servicedesk@ndscs.edu

If you have questions regarding any of the information provided, contact HI Department Chair, Dr. Brandy Gustavus, at brandy.gustavus@ndscs.edu or by phone 701-671-3329.