



The Academic Advisor

A guide for new educators in
Health Information Management programs

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Welcome to Health Information Management Education!

You are about to embark on a challenging, rewarding and most important career.

HIM educators have a dual role. First of all they must have the knowledge and skills of a first-rate HIM practitioner. But they must also possess an additional quality – the ability to enable others to acquire HIM knowledge and skills. They are professional Health Information Managers and professional educators.

Teachers must always be at the forefront of change in the HIM profession, so that the students they guide will be top-notch career candidates, armed with the best information and expertise in the latest technologies. The educational preparation of future generations of HIM practitioners is the foundation of the continued strength and well-being of the Health Information Management profession.

Most new HIM teachers enter the realm of academia with solid practice backgrounds, but relatively little experience as educators. **The Academic Advisor** will introduce you to basic concepts and offer practical advice that can help you get started as an instructor.

You'll find a wealth of resources for practical day-to-day teaching as well as ideas for your particular area of interest, with links to other HIM references as well as resources that address issues related to academia.

We hope that new instructors will find the information in **The Academic Advisor** to be informative, relevant and most of all, useful in helping them to make the transition from practice to education.

The Education Division of AHIMA is here for you. If you have any questions please contact us directly at (312) 233-1100.

HIM Educational Levels

HIM education currently encompasses four levels: non-degree certificates, such as coding certificates; associate degrees; baccalaureate degrees; and master's degrees.

To understand the difference in the educational preparation and types of careers related to each of these levels, please refer to the "AHIMA Framework for HIM Education: Description of Roles for HIM in an Electronic Workplace."

ACCREDITATION AND APPROVAL

Associate-degree and baccalaureate-degree HIM programs seek **accreditation**. This means that they can choose to undergo a rigorous review by AHIMA volunteer accreditation reviewers, whose findings are then reported to the **Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM)**. CAHIIM then decides if the program is in substantial compliance with accreditation *Standards*. After receiving initial accreditation, programs continue to submit a yearly summary report to demonstrate that they are maintaining quality program outcomes. One significant aspect of program accreditation is directly related to the **certification examination**. Only graduates of accredited associate- or baccalaureate-degree HIM programs can apply for the RHIT or RHIA exams.

Pre-degree coding certificate programs seek **approval**. This means that they undergo a paper review to demonstrate that their curriculum and other facets of the program meet AHIMA quality standards for quality coding certificate programs.

Master's degree HIM programs seek **approval**, which means they undergo a review to demonstrate that they have met the model curriculum and quality standards established by AHIMA. Graduates of approved HIM Master's programs are eligible to apply for the RHIA exam.

Designing a Course

The curricula for associate-degree and baccalaureate-degree HIM programs are built upon several foundation documents. These are:

- The CAHIIM *Standards for Accreditation*
- The Model Curriculum
- The Entry-level Competencies
- The Knowledge Clusters /Content
- The AHIMA Framework for HIM Education: Description of Roles for HIM in an Electronic Workplace

When a program director designs an HIM curriculum, each of these aspects must be considered. Likewise, when an instructor designs a course, it is important to know how that course fits into the whole. For example, suppose a new instructor has been assigned to develop and teach a legal aspects course. What would be the logical steps to follow?

- **Refer to the foundation documents.** A good place to start is with the [entry-level competencies](#). Make a note of which competencies are related to issues that you might cover in your class. Then check the [knowledge cluster/content](#) using some of the available analysis tools. Under the heading of “Healthcare Privacy, Confidentiality, Legal and Ethical Issues ” you will find listed a number of content areas that are required to be covered. By combining the information in these two foundation documents, you will be able to design a course that covers the appropriate material in a way that will lead students to achieve the specified competencies in that area.
- **Formulate objectives.** Based upon the competencies, the knowledge cluster content, and the scope of your course, what knowledge and/or skills do you want the students to take away from this course? Create a list of course objectives that describe these outcomes.
- **Choose a textbook.** All textbooks are not created equal! It is a good idea to inspect as many as you can to see which textbook would be the best fit for your class, keeping in mind your competencies and objectives. Many publishers furnish free “desk copies” for teachers, or at least free “inspection copies” (these must

be returned). AHIMA offers many relevant textbooks for HIM programs, with additional web support available.

- **Create an outline for your course.** Regard your chosen text as a guide, not a straitjacket. Design a sequence for your course that takes students from the simple to the complex and from the general to the specific, building in a logical way upon previous knowledge. Be sure to check the content of any prerequisite courses, so you know what material students have already been exposed to. Feel free to change the order of chapters or skip chapters that may be irrelevant to your objectives. When appropriate, use articles from outside sources. One rich source of additional information is the Body of Knowledge (BOK), the AHIMA on-line library.
- **Decide how you will evaluate students.** What methods will you use to keep track of students' progress throughout the course? In addition to tests and exams, consider other possibilities such as written homework, group projects, quizzes, and class presentations. Your syllabus should include a clear description of what content is covered, what assignments, projects, readings will be required, and how students will be evaluated for the course.
- **Establish written policies.** Every teacher needs to set the “rules and regulations” for the course. Your syllabus should include written policies to cover items such as attendance, missed tests, make-up tests, late homework, etc. (If you wish to include any “housekeeping” policies, this would also be a good place to include them, e.g., no eating, no cell phones, no wearing of headsets, etc.)

Once you finish these steps, you will have a good outline of the course you're going to teach.

Planning a class

Once you have your over-all course outline, it is easy to determine the material to be covered. What requires more thought is how much you will cover in each class, and the methods of delivery.

Timing: One of the hardest things for new teachers to gauge is how long it will take to cover the material that has been designated for a particular lesson. Even rehearsing may not help, as every class has its unpredictable occurrences – a lively student discussion that you don't want to cut off, for example. On the other hand, you might encounter a stone-dead silence where you were counting on a 15-minute discussion.

A good strategy is to build some “flex time” into your class. This can be done by including an optional, open-ended activity at the end of the class. This could take the form of a class discussion, or an in-class writing or computer exercise. These activities should not simply be time-fillers, but should be relevant and if possible, carry the subject of the day to a higher level. Assignments not finished by the end of class can be completed as homework.

Reading assignments

Students should be assigned to read relevant chapters and other materials **prior** to the class in which they will be covered. In this way students will come to class prepared for that day’s lesson.