Competency-Based Education (CBE)  
Considerations for the Future  
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August 2016
History

- Approach started in 1960s in adult learning programs as a reaction to employer feedback on graduates that did not have expected skills when entering the workforce.
History

- 1970s DOE offered grants to institutions offering adult learning programs to experiment with CBE, primarily concerned with adult basic skills.
History

- Broader paradigm shift started with Western Governors in 1990s as first higher ed institution to award degrees based on competencies

- **MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH** - March 2013 the DOE approved federal financial aid for CBE students
History

- As of April 2015 Southern New Hampshire and Capella Universities were the first to receive both regional accreditation and DOE approval for direct assessment programs
- Currently 600 institutions considering offering CBE programs
Characteristics

- Based on mastery of *skills* not time
- Self-paced
- Fully online
- Personalized learning paths
- Project-based
- Assignments structured to allow demonstration of mastery
Characteristics

- Learning coaches and subject matter expert assessors

- No grades (no failure!) – practice until you get it

- Start date each month

- Targets adult learners who bring pre-existing experience, knowledge, skills and abilities
Two CBE Models

- Course-based model with credit equivalency
  - E.g. 120 competencies map to 120 credit hours qualifies students for federal financial aid
  - Allows for traditional transcript plus competency transcript

- Direct assessment
  - Direct measure of student mastery of competencies via assessment. No clock hours or credit hours
  - Portfolios, competency transcripts
Pricing Model

- Western Governors University: $2,890 per 6-month term
- University of Wisconsin Flex: $2,250 per 3-month term
- Northern Arizona University: $2,500 per 6-month term
- Southern New Hampshire U (College for America only): $1,250 per 6-month term
- Capella University: $2,000 per 3-month term

Lower cost not lower quality
Process – Backward design

- Identify the competencies/skills required for successful completion of a program (what must students know and be able to do)

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
A graduate of SMU is expected to gain awareness and understanding of human cultures and the physical and natural world through study in Fine Arts and Humanities, Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Science, Technology, and Mathematics.

Communication
A graduate of SMU is expected to use effective written, verbal, and non-verbal communication for a variety of situations, genres, purposes, and audiences.

Critical and Creative Thinking
A graduate of SMU is expected to think critically and creatively by locating, assessing, and analyzing relevant information using quantitative and qualitative reasoning.

Collaboration
A graduate of SMU is expected to demonstrate the ability to learn and work collaboratively with individuals of diverse cultures and perspectives in order to reach common goals.

Personal and Social Responsibility
A graduate of SMU is expected to assess and accept the consequences of one’s actions, be an informed and responsible citizen, and affect positive change in the world.

Integration, Application, and Reflection
A graduate of SMU is expected to integrate general and discipline-based knowledge, apply this knowledge in and beyond the classroom, and reflect upon these experiences.

Figure 1: SMU General Education Program Outcomes
Process – Backward design

- Design assignments/activities for each competency that will move students toward successful demonstration

Compose academic essays in various rhetorical styles
Write a summary of a major position in Weber, Veblen, Cooley, and Mead and a research proposal and paper in a liberal arts discipline with an annotated bibliography.

Demonstrate knowledge of potential and limitations of technology's advances
Demonstrate understanding of impacts of technology on institutions and humanity. Discuss impact of technology on facets of psychology and Sociology, the perpetuation of stereotypes through technology, and possible changes in human nature and ethics due to technology.

Practice an examined or self-reflective life
Discuss a personal statement of the importance of literature, film, and art in understanding human nature; also discuss a personal statement about film's impact in understanding culture. Journal about the meaning of life, explore connections between religion and art and explore connections between history and art/literature.
Process – Backward design

- Provide learning resources in variety of media to allow choice by learning style
Process – Backward design

- Craft rubrics that allow for consistent and rigorous assessment of student work that identify mastery elements
Process – Backward design

- Scaffold activities for progressive levels of difficulty
- Provide extensive feedback from subject matter experts to guide student mastery
SNHU College for America Interface
Challenges

- Retrofitting legacy SIS systems to accommodate 12 monthly start dates, tracking competencies versus credit hours, mapping competency sets to 3-credit courses for academic transcripts, recording mastery not grades.
- Financial aid model for “full-time” and “part-time” students; producing student activity metrics for reporting.
- Bursar – billing cycles for 6-month subscriptions, managing refunds.
- Hiring/training learning coaches to monitor student engagement and progress.
- New model for faculty workload.
Challenges

- Working with subject-matter experts (SMEs) to design relevant and authentic activities/assignments and determine consistent and clear performance indicators (compensation for SMEs) Working out how assessors are compensated
- Lack of off-the-shelf LMS systems to track competency mastery
- Different business model
- Student pre-assessment, orientation, workflow and support
- Transcripting previous credit courses with competencies
- NEASC Accreditation