

WCET Webcast Questions and Answers
[Big Audacious Conversation About Competency-Based Education](#)
March 13, 2014

20:00 to: *Cassi Paslick/Rock Valley College*

Given that no one noticed that the learning outcomes of traditional college programs weren't really being met for such a long time, how do we know the learning outcomes of these Competency Based programs will be any better enforced and monitored?

Linda: Learning outcomes were mapped to competencies during the curriculum development of our competency based courses. A QA rubric following the Quality Matters Standard was created to ensure each course met the requirements. Competency based learning is ideally suited to self-directed learners, who earn college credits by demonstrating competence in each of the identified outcomes by taking a series of proctored assessments in the form of essays, exams, research papers, and various projects. Further, a separation of the assessment developers from the course developers is essential to ensure there is no "teaching to the test", rather, the course is designed to develop the competencies identified for that course.

Mary Alice: Great question. Currently, the quality assurance mechanisms governing competency-based programs are essentially the same as those for traditional programs. That said, the process of developing and implementing a competency-based program may create more opportunities to monitor learning outcomes for a number of reasons. First, learning outcomes are more explicitly defined in CBE programs and are assessed at a more granular level. Second, the competencies are the same across different instructors, creating more consistency in what students learn. Third, students can only advance through demonstrated learning, making outcomes more visible. Fourth, and most important, all students in a program take the same assessments which are designed and delivered in a consistent way. Ultimately, the quality of learning will depend on the quality of the competencies and assessments themselves, but the process of designing and delivering a competency-based program may make it easier for accreditors and others to determine whether learning is actually taking place.

22:56 to: *Debra Woods*

Are rubrics widely accepted as a valid way of evaluating student work and aggregating as long as they are anchored and tuned for inter-rater reliability?

Mary Alice: I certainly can't speak for all institutions, but I would say that many CBE programs use rubrics as the basis for assessments and to ensure consistency across different assessors/graders. For more information on how rubrics are developed and/or implemented, I would encourage you to get in touch with some of the institutions delivering CBE programs.

25:10 to: *Sondra*

I am curious about competency assessments...are these still essentially 'knowledge' tests or are they truly about what students are able to do? Do they measure skills and abilities? If so, how and what are the tools?

Mary Alice: Competency assessments come in many shapes and sizes, and vary depending on the nature of the program of study and the specific competencies being assessed. They assessments can be performance-based, project-based or knowledge-based. Most of the institutions implementing CBE programs assess student learning through a variety of assessments which are tailored to the specific competencies.

26:50 to: *Sinclair DLIS*

How is Broward handling GI students? That is GI Bill students related to rate of pursuit

Linda: Our program allows GI students to take up to 12 credits simultaneously (rate of pursuit), and they must include a traditional face-to-face course to meet the housing benefits requirement.

28:25 to: *Paul Stacey Creative Commons*

How many of these programs are defining their own competencies vs using national or international defined competencies defined for specific jobs.

Mary Alice: It's a great question and I wish I could provide a more precise answer. As I mentioned during the webinar, it is my understanding that a number of institutions are using the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile to support the development of academic competencies. For more occupationally focused programs, I understand that some institutions have used the Department of Labor's Industry Competency Models (<https://www.careeronestop.org/COMPETENCYMODEL/>) as a resource for developing competencies, while others have also used industry certifications (particularly in IT) and/or state licensure exams as an anchor for competency development.

Your question opens the door for another point I always like to make about competency-based education which is that many workforce or career-technical education programs are already competency-based, in the sense of being anchored in the mastery of skills and abilities validated by employers. While these programs may not be time-independent, they are often organized around independent, 3rd-party assessments. In some areas, like the green energy sector and cybersecurity, some training programs are linked to international standards. The interest in competency-based approaches on the academic and "for-credit" side of postsecondary education generates exciting new opportunities to better link noncredit and credit programs, creating more pathways for students to a variety of academic and industry-recognized credentials.

35:00 to: *George Self, Cochise College #2*

Would you please define "Direct Assessment" as opposed to "Competency Based"? They seem to be the same to me.

Mary Alice: Direct assessment is an approach to competency-based education. But it is possible to do competency-based education outside of direct assessment, which is the model that Western Governor's uses.

56:16 to: *Jim West - WSAC*

Prior Learning Assessment was listed on one of the slides but not discussed. What is the relationship, similarities, differences between PLA and CBE?

Mary Alice: Thanks for noticing. Prior learning assessment and competency-based education relate to one another in interesting ways. They are not the same thing, but CBE programs can provide a way for individuals who come into a program with a lot prior knowledge or experience to accelerate their time to completion. In fact, CBE programs create interesting opportunities for both facilitating the process through which students can apply prior learning to a degree and for improving the quality of prior learning assessment:

- 1. Under current regulations, federal financial aid cannot be used to pay for prior learning assessments. However, for students enrolled in a Title IV eligible CBE program, there is no prohibition on them applying their prior learning to advance more quickly through a course or module. They have to demonstrate their learning as part of the program, but they can use federal student aid as they do so.*
- 2. Currently, there are many different ways to translate prior learning into credit, including portfolio assessments, challenge exams, and credit recommendations for military or corporate training. In a competency-based program, prior learning is assessed the same way all learning is assessed in the program, through the demonstration of mastery/proficiency. Hence, CBE programs may provide a more systematic and consistent way for students to get credit for what they know, wherever they learned it.*

39:07 to: *Barbara Zirkin, Stevenson University*

Why would competency based learning have a time limit?

49:43 to: *Karen Gatewood Harcum College 1*

Is there a time limit imposed on students to reach all competencies? For example..for students who have to take a national exam in health fields

Linda: Students are given the option of taking 12 credits simultaneously which gives them the traditional 16 weeks to complete all competencies and pass the assessment for credit, or they may take one course at a time, with 4 weeks to complete.

41:59 to: *Lenaya Hogan- Spokane Falls CC*

How are students paying? Per credit? Per month?

Linda: In-State credit tuition for per course (which is based on the credits earned per course). If a student can pass a series of assessments without access to the learning materials, the student only pays \$7/credit, i.e., a 3 credit course would cost only \$21.00.

42:12 to: *Steve Phillips*

Do you have concerns about graduate schools understanding CBE transcripts?

Linda: So far we have had great success in attaining articulation agreements with many other schools.

44:15 to: *Debra Woods*

How will the changes become sustainable after the grant goes away?

Linda: Sustainability has been an important factor in the design and implementation of our program so far. Creating frameworks that can be integrated systematically is a priority, as well as incorporating existing faculty and staff in the process.

46:21 to: *Kristen*

To Linda: Does Broward College have a readiness assessment as part of the admission process? If yes, are students denied if they do not "pass"? If not, how to handle this?

Linda: We are using SmarterMeasure as our online readiness assessment, also, all students must interview with our recruiting advisor.

47:10 to: *Cassi Paslick/Rock Valley College*

I'd like to second Kristen's question. Are any of these programs open-enrollment, or are there entrance requirements?

Linda: Our program is open-enrollment, no entrance requirements.

46:50 to: *Debra Woods*

Does each regional accreditor authorized by CHEA have its own approach to evaluating CBE? Or are they getting on the same page? (WASC, SACS, etc.)

Mary Alice: I am not an accreditor, so I certainly cannot speak for them. It is the case that competency-based programs have been approved by a number of different regional accreditors and others are currently reviewing programs. While each accreditor does have its own approach, it is my impression that they are all doing their best to both meet the needs of institutions trying to innovate, while also fulfilling their obligations for ensuring quality.

46:56 to: *Tino Corsetti 1*

The decrease in student cost is an excellent outcome. Do the presenters have any information on what impact that had on overall program revenues? Was there a corresponding increase in enrolments to offset? Or were revenue impacts not a measure of success?

Linda: We have only rolled out our second semester, and it is too soon to report results.

47:16 to: *Debra Woods*

Don't GI Bill programs require grades?

Linda: Yes, they do and an "S" and/or "U" is considered a grade.

47:20 to: *Teri H.*

Question for both ladies - what types of outreach are they doing with their faculty?

Linda: We have provided special training materials for faculty teaching our CBE courses and required reporting of student interaction and progress.

Mary Alice: (I can't answer this question, since I don't work at an institution. I can say that one theme I hear repeatedly in discussions with institutions is on the importance (and challenges) of involving faculty in the development of CBE programs).

50:03 to: *Joseph Hoey*

Would love more info about how/who is linking back to Lumina DQP.

Linda: We are a member of Competency-Based Education Network (CBEN), a newly formed national network for developing higher education models, which is supported by Lumina and coordinated by Public Agenda.

45:41 to: *Cassi Paslick/Rock Valley College*

So far all these points seem aimed at technical programs. Has anyone tried this in the area of liberal arts?

@Cassi Paslick, our friends from NAU have liberal arts programs

<http://news.nau.edu/nau-jumps-the-field-with-competency-based-personalized-learning/>

52:02 to: *Cassi Paslick/Rock Valley College*

Are there any other resources to see what NAU are doing?

52:47 to: *jeanniecopley*

NAU Personalized Learning are here. Please connect with us if you need information

55:38 to: *jeanniecopley*

Cassi - with NAU, our students register per 6-month subscriptions; can take as much competency lessons applicable to their degree completion

52:50 to: *Kate McKain*

What systems are institutions using to monitor and track students' progress on achieving competencies?

Mary Alice: I think institutions are finding ways to adapt (or adopt new) information management systems to meet their needs. I have a sense that a growing number of vendors are exploring how to make it easier – but I don't have any more specific information.

Linda: Broward College is using D2L as our LMS.

53:18 to: *Kristen*

Mary Alice, is there any organization or institution that is teaching institutions how to develop competencies?

Mary Alice: Western Governor's University conducts a training seminar on how to develop competency-based programs.

54:17 to: *Cassi Paslick/Rock Valley College*

What about cost and timing? Do students pay per semester? or per competency?

Linda: Students pay per course.

57:40 to: *Hal Morgan - Univ of Phoenix*

Do any of you have any experience with the Comp Based Education Network (Lumina Found) or Innovation Challenge (Bill & Melinda Gates Found) programs? If so, what is your take on these groups and their contribution to CBE?

Linda: We are a member of the CBEN network, the first conference is scheduled for next month, more information can be provided after that event.

Mary Alice: I am familiar with the group and it strikes me as an excellent community of practice of institutions that are trying to figure out how to develop, improve, or scale their competency-based programs. It includes institutions with lots of experience with CBE, and institutions just getting started, so there are lots of learning opportunities. As part of their work, the group submitted a set of suggestions to the Department of Education on the design of experiments to test competency-based education models and the effect of waiving some requirements around Title IV on the effectiveness of these programs. They developed a very helpful brief that lays out how the rules around Title IV make it difficult to deliver competency-based education models. You can find it here: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/files/2014/01/Experimental-Sites-Concept-Paper-FINAL.pdf>. It's a great example of how information sharing among institutions is helping advance everyone's understanding of the challenges and opportunities of competency-based education.

59:00 to: *Debra Woods*

What are completion rates like for CBE programs? Comparable to traditional?

Linda: We are only in the second semester, and do not have actual completion data to report yet.

Mary Alice: I can't speak to completion rates for all institutions implementing competency programs, but I would say that part of the reason there is so much interest in CBE is because in the institutions where it has been implemented, such as Western Governor's, it has performed well. That said, more rigorous evaluation and comparisons with traditional models will be helpful, which we will hopefully see with the experimental sites.



1:00:39 to: *Wichita State University*

How does this model plan to move forward within the constraints regarding Financial Aid and Title IV

Linda: With the defined use of credit hour, we do not see any issues moving forward with FA.